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# Horizon, Bright Moon, Sabre

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# Prologue

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*Is the horizon far away?*

*Not at all!*

*Man is at the horizon, how can the horizon be far away?*

*What colour is the bright moon?*

*It is blue; and like the ocean, blue, deep and sorrowful.*

*Where is the bright moon?*

*It is in his heart; his heart is the bright moon.*

*What about his sabre?*

*His sabre is in his hand!*

*What kind of blade is that?*

*His sabre is as broad and as lonely as the horizon, as pure and sorrowful as the bright moon; even with a flash of steel, some times it is as if it is empty.*

*Empty?*

*Empty and illusional, as if it never exists, yet present everywhere.*

*But the speed of his sabre does not appear to be very swift.*

*How can a sabre that is not swift be invincible under the heavens?*

*This is because his sabre has gone beyond the limits of speed!*

*Where is he?*

*He has not returned, but his heart is already broken.*

*Where is the path of his return?*

*The path is right in front of him.*

*Cannot he see the path?*

*He is not looking for it.*

*So he cannot find the path?*

*Perhaps not now, but he will find it sooner or later.*

*Will he find it for sure?*

*Definitely!*

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# Chapter 1 – The Man at the Horizon

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The sun was setting in the west.

Fu Hongxue stood alone under the setting sun. It was as though he were the only person in the whole wide world.

It was cold and barren for a thousand miles around; it seemed that even the setting sun had changed colour because of its loneliness, changed into a greyish white that was mournful and desolate.

He felt the same.

His hand clenched a sabre; a pale white fist with a pitch black sabre!

Pale white and pitch black were colours close to Death! And Death was the limit of voidness and loneliness!

His eyes were lonely and empty; they could almost see death!

Could it be death was just in front of his eyes?

He was walking. He walked very slowly, but he never stopped. Even if Death was waiting for him in front, he would never stop.

His walking posture was strange and unique; the left foot would take a quick step forward, and the right foot would follow slowly. He appeared to walk with considerable difficulty. Nevertheless, he had walked countless of miles, made innumerable journeys; and he walked that entire road by himself, step by step.

When could he stop walking like this? When could he even stop walking?

He didn't know. In fact, he had never considered it!

Now that he had got here, what lay beyond? Was Death really in front? Definitely! His eyes contained Death, his hand also gripped Death; in fact his sabre represented Death!

It was a pitch black blade with a pitch black handle and a pitch black sheath.

His sabre may represent Death, but it was his whole life!

The sky had become even darker, but still he could make out the presence of a small town in the far distance.

He knew that was Phoenix Settlement, one of the more populous towns in the remote area. Of course he knew, because that was where the death he was searching for was to be found.

Little did he know that Phoenix Settlement was already dead!

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The street was not very long or very wide, but there were still numerous stores, stalls and houses along the streets.

There were countless such towns in the world, and every one of them was the same; streets with many stores, stalls and houses; and these stalls had dilapidated store fronts, cheap goods and honest merchants. In the houses lived kind and friendly people. However, Phoenix Settlement was different from these other towns. While the stores and the stalls and the houses were still present, there was nobody around.

Nobody, not a single person was around.

There were doors and windows that lined both sides of the street. Some were shut, but all were broken, smashed. Thick stacks of dust covered the streets, inside and outside the houses and stores. The roofs and beams were full of spider webs. A black cat was startled by the footsteps and leaped out, but it had already lost its alertness and agility. It was panting and limping as it crawled across the street; it did not even look like a cat anymore.

Wasn't it a well known fact that starvation could change everything?

Could it be that the cat was the sole surviving creature in this little town?

Fu Hongxue's heart turned cold, even colder than the blade in his hand.

He was presently standing on this street, and seeing everything with his own eyes. But he could not believe, dared not believe, and would not believe.

What disaster had befallen this place?

How did this tragedy occur?

At the side of the street, an old signboard was squeaking in the wind. He could still make out the words beneath all that dust "Chen Family Tavern, Best Vintage In Town!"

This was originally one of the nicer looking signboards in the district, but it was now tattered and broken, just like teeth of elderly people.

But the condition of the tavern was much worse than the signboard.

Fu Hongxue stood silently, observing and waiting. As the wind died down, he strolled over to the tavern and pushed open the door. It was as though he walked into a grave that had been exhumed.

He had been here before!

Though the wine was not even good, much less vintage, at least it wasn't vinegar. And the place had looked far from a grave.

Exactly a year ago, this place was still a busy establishment. Travellers from all over who past through Phoenix Settlement would be attracted by the signboard outside, and stopped for a drink here.

Once wine entered empty stomachs, people became chatty. Hence, the tavern was always noisy. Noisy taverns attracted people.

The tavern was not very small, but it was always crowded. The owner of the tavern was very friendly, and a smile was always seen on his face.

But the smile had disappeared, clean tables had become table tops filled with dust; the ground was littered with broken wine bottles, the aromatic smell of wine had turned into a putrid odour which was vomit-inducing.

Laughter, chatter, wine swigging in the tavern; clanking of buckets and knives, and oil boiling in woks behind the tavern; these sounds had all vanished. Only the creaking sounds of broken window panes swinging in wind were left; and they were oddly reminiscent to the flapping of bats' wings in prisons.

The skies had darkened even further; it was almost pitch black.

Fu Hongxue walked slowly to a corner and sat down unhurriedly, with his back towards the door.

That was the corner he sat when he came here a year ago. But the place was presently like a grave; there was no place for any living person to hang about.

Why did he still choose to sit down? Was he reminiscing about the past? Or was he waiting?

If he was reminiscing, what could have happened that was worthy of his reminiscence?

If he was waiting, who or what was he waiting for?

Was it Death? Was it really Death?

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The colour of night had finally wrapped her arms around all of the land. There were no lamps, candles or fire; only darkness.

He hated the darkness. However, darkness was similar to death in that they were both inescapable.

Now that darkness had arrived, what about death? He sat there without moving, his hand still clenched tightly to his sabre. Perhaps you could still see the pale hand, but certainly not the sabre, for it had melted into the darkness.

Was his sabre as inescapable as death?

The night was as silent as death. Suddenly, the wind brought the melodious strains of string instrumental music.

Under such depressing circumstances, it was as though the music came from the heavens.

His empty eyes had a strange expression after hearing this heavenly music. – Many adjectives could be used to describe this expression, but joyfulness was not one of them.

The music steadily increased in volume. Amongst the raising music volume, the creaking of the wheels of a horse carriage could also be heard.

Who other than Fu Hongxue could be rushing to this God-forsaken place?

Fu Hongxue's eyes were slowly returning to their original coldness, but the hand that was on his sabre clenched even tighter.

Could it be that he knew the person that was coming?

Could it be that he was waiting for this person?

Could it be that this person was Death himself?

What kind of music did heavenly music sound like? Nobody had ever heard how heavenly music sound like!

But if there existed a form of music which could melt one's heart, and even one's soul, this music would be as close to as heavenly music as it could be heard on earth. The music that Fu Hongxue was listening to would certainly qualify to be heavenly music.

But Fu Hongxue did not melt.

He sat there listening, but remained still and silent. All of a sudden, eight men dressed in black coats with colourful silk sashes tied to their waists walked into the tavern in quick steps. All of them were carrying bamboo baskets; these baskets contained peculiar items, including cloth rags and brooms.



None of them stopped to give Fu Hongxue a glance. Once in the tavern, they began to clean and tidy up the tavern. All of them worked briskly.

Not only did they work briskly, they were also worked very efficiently.

The dilapidated tavern had a miraculous make over in a very short period of time.

Every nook and cranny was cleaned up until not a speck of dust remained. Wallpaper was put up, and beads hung in front of the door frames. There were table cloths on all tables, and even a red carpet on the floor. Only the corner that Fu Hongxue was sitting at remained untouched.

Once the eight men were done cleaning up, they stood in attention near the tavern entrance. Four women who were dressed in bright colours walked into the tavern, holding bamboo baskets. They placed fresh flowers, food and wine on a table.

A row of string ensemble players strolled in, playing beautiful music.

A single drum beat could be heard amongst the music. It was already midnight. From the window, a solitary figure could be seen dressed in white, holding a watchman's drum. He looked like a spirit standing alone in the darkness.

Where did this night watchman come from?

Was he constantly reminding people of the coming of death?

Who was he reminding this time?

After the reverberation of the watchman drum ended, the song began:

“The road to the horizon,  
A path of no return,  
Man broke his soul at the horizon ,  
But the soul was broken before reaching the horizon.....”

The song had not yet ended. But a seemingly drunk Yan Nanfei was already walking into the tavern.

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## Chapter 2 – Wild Rose at the Horizon

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*"The flowers have not yet wilted;  
the moon has not yet waned,  
so where doth the moon shine?  
Wild roses are at the horizon."*

Was Yan Nanfei truly drunk?

He sat down beside the fresh flowers, in between beautiful women, in front of a golden cup of wine.

The wine was amber, and the roses were bright.

The scent of the roses in his hand were intoxicating, but they were nothing compared to the wine.

He was totally inebriated, and collapsed on the laps and knees of the beautiful women that were sitting next to him.

Beautiful women were also intoxicating; they giggled like orioles, and their cheerful faces turned into beautiful shades of pink.

He was still a youth; a youth with youthful exuberance. He had plenty of gold, he had perfumed flowers, fine wine and beautiful women. What a happy time it is, what a happy life.

But why did he come to this dead town to enjoy all these pleasures?

Was he here because of Fu Hongxue?

He did not even give Fu Hongxue a glance, as though he did not realise Fu Hongxue's existence.

Fu Hongxue too behaved in the same way, as though others did not exist. Around him, there were no flowers, women, nor wine; it was as though an invisible wall separated him and the other merry makers.

He had not taken part in such merry-making activities for a very long time.

The watchman's drum was struck once again. It was now the second watch.

They were still drinking and making merry. They seemed to have totally forgotten all the frustrations, sorrow and pain in the world.

He was still holding a cup full of wine in one hand, and a stalk of wild rose on the other. A beautiful woman tugged at his hand and asked, "Why do you like the wild rose?"

"Wild roses have thorns."

"You like thorns?"

"I like to pierce people. Pierce their hands and pierce their heart."

The beautiful woman's hand was pierced, her heart was also pierced.

She grimaced in pain, frowned and shook her head, "That is not a good reason, I don't like it."

"You don't like it? What would you have liked to hear then?"

Yan Nanfei laughed. "Do you want to listen to another story?"

"Of course I do."

"Once upon a time, in a place far far away, a nightingale saw a wild rose in bloom and fell in love with it. The bird was so much in love, it leaped from the branch into the pond and drowned."

"That story is beautiful," the beautiful woman's eyes had turned red, "but it is too sad."

"You are wrong." Yan Nanfei's smile had become even wider, "Death is not something sorrowful. If there was pride in death, or even beauty in death, then there is nothing to fear."

The beautiful woman stared at the wild rose that was in his hand. The wild rose appeared to be smiling too.

She stared at the rose intently for a while, and whispered,

*"This morning, I wanted to give you a few stalks of wild roses.  
I spent a lot of time tying the flowers to my girdle.  
But the girdle loosened and even the flowers were loosened too.  
They fell and scattered, some to the winds and others into the water.  
The river waters flowed eastward, and the flower petals too, never to return.  
River waves had become crimson red with petals, but only a light fragrance  
remains on my sleeve."*

Her poem was beautiful, just like a song.

She lifted her sleeves, "Please smell them. I insist you smell them, as our final remembrance."

Yan Nanfei looked at her sleeves and held her hand lightly.

Just at this moment, the night watchman's drum reverberated once more.

It was the third watch!

*"The road to the horizon,  
A path of no return,  
In the third watch past midnight,  
Time for the destruction of Man's soul."*

Yan Nanfei suddenly released the her hands.

The music stopped abruptly.

He waved his hand and gave a short command, "Leave".

It was like a magic spell. The ghostly night watchman had just struck his drum for the third watch. Immediately the command was issued and immediately the previously joyful atmosphere disappeared.

The tavern had become bare, and only two people remained.

Even the beautiful woman whose hand pricked by the wild rose left. Her hand was hurt but her heart was hurt far more deeply.

The horse carriage left, and the lands returned to their original state of deathlike loneliness.

Only one lamp remained indoors, and the weak light flickered at Yan Nanfei's bright eyes.

He appeared to be drunk, but his eyes were far from drunk.

Fu Hongxue was still sitting quietly at his corner.

Not listening, not seeing, nor moving.

But Yan Nanfei was now standing up and in so revealed the sword on his waist.

Bright red scabbard; bright red hilt!

More red than the wild rose; more red than blood.

The tavern was filled with happiness a short while ago, was suddenly filled with an air of murderous intent.

He walked forward, towards Fu Hongxue.

He may be drunk, but his sword was certainly not intoxicated.

His sword was already in his hand.

A pale white hand clenched to a blood red sword.

Fu Hongxue's hand was also clenched to his sabre.

His sabre never left his hand, no matter what happened.

A pale white hand clenched to a pitch black sabre!

The sabre was as black as death, and the scabbard was as red as blood.

The distance between these weapons was slowly diminishing.

The distance between Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei was slowly diminishing.

The murderous air thickened even further.

Yan Nanfei was finally standing in front of Fu Hongxue. Suddenly he pulled his sword out; the light reflected from the blade of the sword was as radiant as the sun's rays, yet as beautiful as the wild roses under sunlight.

The sword emitted a powerful aura, right between Fu Hongxue's eyebrows.

Fu Hongxue was still not listening, not seeing, nor moving!

Light rays from the sword flashed passed him. The beaded door curtain that was hanging on the door frame nearby was severed into two; the beads fell from the curtain like tear drops from a beautiful woman.

Then the sword rays disappeared suddenly.

The sword was still there, still in Yan Nanfei's hand. He raised his sword with two hands, and presented it to Fu Hongxue.

The sharpness of the sword was unparalleled under the heavens!

The sword technique that he used was also unparalleled under the heavens!

Why was he presenting such a sword to Fu Hongxue?

He came from afar, made merry and drank.

He pulled out his sword, swung it, and presented it as a gift.

What was really happening?

His hands were pale, and the blade of his sword also appeared to be pale under the dim light from a lamp.

Fu Hongxue's face was even paler.

He finally raised his head slowly, and gazed at the sword in Yan Nanfei's hands.

He shown no expression, but the pupils of his eyes narrowed.

Yan Nanfei was also gazing at him; bright eyed, carrying a strange expression. Was it an expression of a person that was close to the ultimate release of joy, or one of unspeakable and helpless sorrow?

Fun Hongxue raised his head further and stared into Yan Nanfei's eyes. It was as though he had just noticed Yan Nanfei.

Two pairs of eyes established contact. There was a flash of some sort, a spark; as though there was silent communication between them.

"You are here," said Fu Hongxue, unexpectedly.

"I am here," Yan Nanfei replied.

Fu Hongxue said, "I knew you would come."

Yan Nanfei replied, "I would come for sure, and you knew that. If not, you would not have let me go a year ago."

Fu Hongxue looked grave, and gazed long and hard at the sword that in Yan Nanfei's hand before slowly said,

"Now a year has passed."

Yan Nanfei said, "Exactly one full year."

Fu Hongxue sighed, "What a long year that was."

Yan Nanfei also sighed, "What a short year that was."

Was the span of a year truly long or short?

Yan Nanfei gave a short burst of laughter; his laughter was laced with sarcasm, "You felt that the year had passed slowly only because you were waiting. You have been waiting for today to come."

"What about you?" Fu Hongxue asked.

"I didn't wait at all," Yan Nanfei answered.

He gave a faint smile and continued, "Although I knew that today would be the day I die, but I am not the sort of person to wait for death."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Was it because you had so many things to settle that you found the year to be too short?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "The year was certainly too short."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Have you completed everything that you wanted to finish? Your desires and wishes?"

The sword rays were illumining; the thin blade of the sword flashed like lightning.

The sabre seemed slower in comparison.

The sword rays had not arrived, but the sabre was already forcing the sword back.

Then the sabre was at Yan Nanfei's throat.

It was Fu Hongxue's sabre at Yan Nanfei's throat.

The sabre was in Fu Hongxue's hand, and that hand was now back on the table.

Yan Nanfei stared at this pitch black sabre for a long time, and said slowly, "A year ago, I was defeated by your sabre."

Fu Hongxue lightly, "Perhaps you should not have lost. You were too young, but yet your swordplay was too worn."



Yan Nanfei was silent as if in deep consideration of Fu Hongxue's words. After a long while, he said unhurriedly, "You asked me then, if I had any unfulfilled wishes left."

Fu Hongxue nodded, "I had asked you that!"

Yan Nanfei continued, "I replied then, that though I had unfinished business, that business was my own and only mine to do."

Fu Hongxue answered, "I remember."

"I told you then, that you could kill me anytime, but you could forget about forcing me to reveal anything if I was unwilling to do so." Yan Nanfei said.

Fu Hongxue nodded. "And now...?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "Now is still the same!"

Fu Hongxue asked, "Still the same unwillingness to talk?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "You loaned me a year's time, to let me finish my business. Now had a year has passed, I..."

"Came back here to die!" Fu Hongxue said.

Yan Nanfei nodded. "That is correct. I came back here to die!"

He held his sword, and spoke each word with care, "You can kill me now."

He had come here to die!

He was originally from \*Jiangnan. He rushed through thousands of li, just to get to Phoenix Settlement, just in time to die!

[\*Jiangnan, literally South of the River, refers to regions south of the Yangzi River, also known as the Chang Jiang.]

He drank his fill of wine from gold wine cups and made merry; but all these were merely forms of pre-death entertainment.

How beautiful and stately was this kind of death.

The sword was still in his hand; the sabre was still on the table.

“At this very time and place a year ago, I could have killed you.” Fu Hongxue said.

Yan Nanfei said, “You let me go a year ago, was it because you were sure I would return?”

“If you did not, I would probably never have found you.” Fu Hongxue answered.

“Very possibly” Yan Nanfei agreed.

“But you came” Fu Hongxue said.

“I would have come no matter what,” Yan Nanfei replied.

“Because of this, I can give you one more year for you to complete your unfinished business.” Fu Hongxue said.

“No need” Yan Nanfei answered.

“No need?” Fu Hongxue questioned.

“Since I’m here, I am already mentally prepared to die.” Yan Nanfei said.

“You don’t want to live for one more year?” Fu Hongxue asked.

Yan Nanfei suddenly gave a long guffaw, “If a true man lives in the world, but could not help the weak and destroy evil; avenge wrongs and repay kindness. He would be no better than being dead, even if he lived another hundreds of years.”

He was laughing, yet in his laughter carried an indescribable pain and anguish.

Fu Hongxue looked at him intently, waited for his laughter to die before abruptly said, “But you still have unfulfilled wishes.”

“Who said that?” Yan Nanfei retorted.

"I did. I can tell." Fu Hongxue answered.

Yan Nanfei gave a cold laugh, "Even if I have some unfulfilled wishes, it is none of your business."

Fu Hongxue said, "But I am..."

Yan Nanfei interrupted him, "You had never been a man of many words, and I didn't come here to talk to you!"

"You only wish for a quick death?" Fu Hongxue asked.

"Yes." The answer was short and swift.

"You would rather die than to reveal your unfulfilled wishes?" Fu Hongxue asked.

"Yes," Yan Nanfei said definitely.

The "Yes" came out strong and decisive. Nothing in this world could change his mind.

The hand that Fu Hongxue was holding the sabre with had veins popping out of the arm.

Once the sabre left its sheath, death would follow. Nothing in the world could stop it.

Was his sabre getting ready to leave its sheath?

Yan Nanfei presented his sword to Fu Hongxue with both hands, "I would rather die by my own sword."

"I know!" Fu Hongxue answered.

"But you are using your sabre anyway?" Yan Nanfei asked.

"You have some things that you refuse to do. So do I." Fu Hongxue answered.

Yan Nanfei was silent, then spoke slowly, "After I die, would you take good care of my sword?"

Fu Hongxue said coldly, "If the sword is alive, the person is alive. If the person perishes, so will the sword. When you die, your sword will join you in your destruction."

Yan Nanfei gave a deep breath out and closed his eyes. "All right, strike me down now!"

Fu Hongxue's sabre had already left its sheath, but it had not found its mark yet. There was a deafening rattling noise, like that of a giant wheel rolling on the ground. Then, a loud explosion sounded.

The already rotting tavern door was blown apart by this explosion, and something rolled in. It was large and shiny golden sphere; the sphere was the size of the wheels on a wagon.

Fu Hongxue did not move, and neither did Yan Nanfei turn his head.

The golden sphere was rolling towards Yan Nanfei, and was about to run him over.

No man can withstand the force of such a collision. That force was not one that mere flesh and blood can stop.

Just at this very moment, Fu Hongxue drawn his sabre!

The sabre flashed, and stopped moving.

All motion and noise stopped too.

The seemingly unstoppable golden sphere stopped after being tapped lightly with his sabre.

At the same moment, thirteen spears flew out of the golden sphere, straight towards Yan Nanfei's back.

Yan Nanfei still did not move, and Fu Hongxue's sabre moved again.

Light from the sabre flashed, and the spearheads all broke and fell. The golden sphere looked as though it weighed a ton, but it had been cut into four quarters by the sabre.

The sphere was actually hollow, and the four quarters opened like those of flower petals. A small, dwarfish man was sitting on the floor amongst the four pieces of what remained of the sphere. He sat there without moving.

That sabre lopped off thirteen spear heads and hacked the golden sphere to four quarters with one slash; the speed and force of this slash was incredible and unimaginable. It was as though all the magic and energy in this world united to generate this sabre slash.

The sabre technique that was used was beyond all other sabre techniques; it was enough to destroy everything.

However, even with the destruction of the spear heads and the golden sphere, that short man was still perfectly fine and sitting on the floor. Not only was he motionless, he had no expression on his face. It was as though he was a man made of wood.

The windows and door were wrecked by the impact; some roof tiles were loosened and fell. They landed on this wooden man; the sound of ceramic tiles crashing against wood was produced.

It turned out that the man was really made of wood.

Fu Hongxue looked at him coldly. Since he didn't move, Fu Hongxue also didn't move.

How could a wooden man move about anyway?

Unexpectedly, this one did.

He moved quickly and suddenly rocketed towards Yan Nanfei's back.

He had no weapons.

He used his own person as a weapon, his entire body, his four limbs were all weapons. Even the most menacing weapons required a person to handle

them, because weapons themselves were not alive. However, this weapon was totally alive!

Also at that very moment, a pair of hands came up from the ground and grabbed hold of Yan Nanfei's legs. This move was also totally unexpected. Now even if Yan Nanfei had wanted to avoid the attack, he would not have been able to.

This attack was very well coordinated; the sudden movement of the Wood Man; the hands from the ground; attacking from both top and bottom. Wood Man's legs had also wrapped around Yan Nanfei's waist, both his hands already flying at the throat in top speed!

This attack was not only totally out of ordinary, but also carefully planned. It was a strike that would not have failed to hit the target.

It is a pity that they forgot that Yan Nanfei had a sabre close to him!

Fu Hongxue's sabre!

A sabre totally unmatched under the heavens!

The sabre flashed! Just a single flash!

There were open wounds on all four hands, Wood Man's hand was bleeding originally.

The blood oozing out from the new wounds was just as red. But his deadwood face had grimaced.

The hands loosen, all four hands. A man totally covered with soil leaped out from the ground. He looked like a man made of mud.

Mud Man was also a dwarf.

Both of them leaped up, made a turn in the air, and each withdrawing to a corner. No one chased after them.

Fu Hongxue's sabre was motionless, as he was. Yan Nanfei didn't even turn his head.

Mud Man held his hands up, suddenly turned and said, "This is all your fault. You said that nothing could go wrong with our plan of attack."

Wood Man replied, "Now that we have failed, we have best kill ourselves now. Returning with failure would mean death anyway."

"How do you wish to die?" asked Mud Man.

"I am a wooden man, certainly the best way to die is to go up in flames," Wood Man said.

"All right then, you better burn yourself to ashes." Mud Man told him.

Wood Man gave a small sigh, and really set fire to his clothes up with a fire starter.

The fire burned very quickly. In a very short while, Wood Man was totally in flames.

Mud Man stood afar to avoid the heat. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Hold on, you cannot die yet; you still have a few thousand taels of silver in paper money. They are of no use to anybody if they are burnt into ashes."

A voice actually came out from the flames, "Come and get it yourself."

Mud Man said, "I am afraid of the heat."

A loud sigh came from within the flames and suddenly a jet of clear water sprouted up vertically within the flames. Falling onto the flaming mass like rain, creating a fog of mist.

The fire was doused immediately, and creating a lot of thick smoke.

Wood Man remained in the smoke, nobody could see how badly Wood Man was burnt.

Fu Hongxue did not even glance at him, he was only concerned about one person.

Yan Nanfei, however looked as though he would not concern himself with anyone ever again.

The smoke was everywhere in the tavern. The smoke floated out though the door windows.

There was a small breeze outside.

The smoke floated out and disappeared into the winds.

That little black cat that was crossing the street earlier had been hiding behind a pillar some distance away.

A small wisp of smoke was blown towards the direction of this cat. It stiffened and collapsed; its leg muscles were still twitching.

Although it had been through the horrors of the destruction and starvation, it was still alive. But, this small wisp of smoke turned it into a bag of rotten bones within the twinkle of an eye. At this moment, Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei were standing right in the smoke.

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## Chapter 3 – Bright Moon at the High Mansion

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Thick smoke slowly dispersed.

This is a life taking smoke. There were simply too many renowned heroes who had fallen suddenly and noiselessly to this thick smoke.

As the smoke was dispersing, Wood Man's eyes were shining with elation. He was certain that his opponents had fallen.

In fact, he hoped to see them on the ground, still struggling to the last. He hoped that they would crawled in front of him and begged for the antidote.

Even Shi Batian and Bronze Tiger had knelt in front him before, and begged piteously for the antidote.

They were the most terrifying strongmen in the martial world; but when facing death, even the bravest would become cowardly.

To him, the suffering and hopelessness of other people were a source of pleasure and gratification.

But this time, he was disappointed.

Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei did not fall. In fact, their eyes were still shining.

The light in Wood Man's eyes was extinguished, just like the flames on his torso. His clothes were burnt to ashes and were scattered into the winds along with the thick smoke. Only a person with soot blackened skin was left. It looked like cast iron that was inflammable, yet like burnt charcoal too.

Yan Nanfei suddenly spoke, "These two people are the Double Killers of the Five Elements."

Fu Hongxue gave a "humph" in reply.

[Wood hiding within Metal, Water and Fire coming from the same source], [Hidden movement in borrowed Earth, Ghost hands grabbing legs], normally these assassination moves were practically impossible to defend against. The Double Killers of the Five Elements were one of a few professional assassins who commanded the highest price. It was rumoured that they were already men of huge fortunes, if not millionaires.

Unfortunately, in this world no matter how many times a millionaire you were, to some people you were essentially worthless.

Mud Man laughed uneasily, and spoke first, "He is Metal-Wood-Water-Fire, and I am Earth. I am nothing really, a stupid donkey, a useless potato and a worthless dog."

He was looking very intently at the sabre in Fu Hongxue's hand.

The sabre was already back in its sheath. A pitch black hilt and a pitch black sheath.

Mud Man sighed, and laughed bitterly, "Even if we did not recognise Hero Fu, we would have recognised this sabre."

Wood Man said, "But we could not imagine that Hero Fu would save him."

Fu Hongxue retorted coldly, "This life is already mine."

Wood Man answered, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue: "Apart from me, no one else can touch a strand of his hair."

Wood Man, "Yes, yes."

Mud Man pleaded, "If Hero Fu promises to spare my life, I would immediately scam somewhere far far away."

Fu Hongxue said, "Scram."

His words were barely out of his mouth when Wood Man and Mud Man scampered off. In fact, they actually rolled out like two balls.

Yan Nanfei suddenly laughed, and said, "I knew you definitely would not kill them,"

"Oh?" Fu Hongxue replied.

Yan Nanfei explained, "because they are not worthy enough."

Fu Hongxue looked intently at the sabre that was in this hand, but there was an unspeakable sense of loneliness in his expression. He never had many friends to begin with. Now even his remaining enemies were dwindling in number. Under the heavens, how many people were still worthy of his sabre?

Fu Hongxue said slowly, "I heard that their price for killing Shi Batian was three hundred thousand taels."

Yan Nanfei replied, "Absolutely correct."

Fu Hongxue said, "Your life is obviously worth more than Shi Batian's."

Yan Nanfei said, "Far more."

Fu Hongxue said, "Not many people can afford their price for you."

Yan Nanfei shut his mouth.

Fu Hongxue said, "I didn't ask as you had known that person's identify long ago."

Yan Nanfei's mouth was still shut tight. Silence without words.

Fu Hongxue continued, "Your unfulfilled wishes was to deal with this person?"

Without warning, Yan Nanfei laughed coldly, "You had already asked too much!"

Fu Hongxue, "You are not willing to say?"

Yan Nanfei, "Not willing."

Fu Hongxue, "Then, you go!"

Yan Nanfei, "I am even more unwilling to go!"

Fu Hongxue, "Don't forget that I had already loaned you a year. What you still own me was the span of a year."

Yan Nanfei, "You want me to repay it? In what way?"

Fu Hongxue, "By clearing up your unfinished business."

Yan Nanfei, "But, I..."

Fu Hongxue lifted his head slowly and looked hard at him, "If you are a true man, even when facing death, you would want to die with integrity."

He had lifted his head up high, but Yan Nanfei followed his head, as if unwilling to let him see the expressions on his face.

Nobody could explain what was that expression. – Was it sadness? Pain? or Fear?

Fu Hongxue said, "Your sword is still alive, your body still alive. Why did you have no courage to face him?"

Yan Nanfei lifted his head up, held his sword tightly in his hand, "Fine, I would go. After a year, I would certainly return."

Fu Hongxue said, "I know!"

There was still wine on the table.

Yan Nanfei suddenly turned around to grab the wine bottle, "You still do not drink?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I don't drink!"

Yan Nanfei looked at him, "People who don't drink, are they always sober?"

Fu Hongxue replied, "Not necessarily."

Yan Nanfei tilted his head backwards, guffawed loudly and drank half the bottle of wine in one gulp. Then he walked out of the tavern in large strides.

He walked very fast. Because he knew the road ahead was not only difficult, but also very long. So long that it was mind-boggling.

Dead town. Deserted street. Lonely world. Lonely bright moon too.

Tonight was a night of a full moon.

The moon was full, but the heart was already empty.

Yan Nanfei walked under the moon light. He was walking in large strides, walking very fast.

But Fu Hongxue kept following behind him. No matter how fast he walked. The moment he turned around, he would immediately see the lonely cripple, using that clumsy looking and strange posture, slowly shuffling behind.

The stars were dispersing, the moon was dimming and the night was almost over. He was still following, still keeping the same distance behind.

Finally, Yan Nanfei could take it no more. He turned around and yelled loudly, "Are you my shadow?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

"Then why do you kept following me?" Yan Nanfei questioned.

Fu Hongxue answered, "I am not willing to allow you to die in someone else's hands."

Yan Nanfei gave a cold laugh, "I don't need you to worry for me. I have always been able to take care of myself."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Can you really?"

He did not let Yan Nanfei but immediately continued, "Only the a truly emotionless person can take care of themselves. You feel too much."

Yan Nanfei asked, "What about you?"

Fu Hongxue said grimly, "I may used to have feelings, but I had forgotten them. Long forgotten them."

His pale face was without emotion. Who could have noticed that behind this cold, grim mask hid deep, heart wrenching pain? Who could have seen those painful memories?

If a person's heart was truly dead, feelings totally extinguished, no one in the world could hurt him.

Yan Nanfei gazed hard at him and unhurriedly said, "You are wrong if you think you can take care of yourself. "

"Oh?" Fu Hongxue replied.

Yan Nanfei said, "There's one more person in this world that can hurt you."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Who?"

"Yourself," Yan Nanfei answered.

The day broke, and the sun rose.

The sun had already illuminated the dark, gloomy and cold Earth. And also the words on a stone plaque at the side of the road: "Phoenix Settlement".

Only this stone plaque, and these three words, remained the same as they had been a year ago.

Fu Hongxue was not a man who shown his sadness easily. But when he walked past this plaque, he could not help but turned and looked at it again.

The lands were broad as the seas were wide. Changes that happened in this world were often large. But the change that occurred here was undoubtedly too fast, so fast that it was unnatural.

Yan Nanfei could guessed Fu Hongxue's feelings, and asked suddenly, "You didn't expect this at all?"

Fu Hongxue nodded his head slowly, and said, "No, I didn't, but you already knew."

Yan Nanfei said, "Oh?"

Fu Hongxue answered, "You already knew that this town was dead, that was why you brought your wine and your music with you."

Yan Nanfei did not deny this.

Fu Hongxue said, "You obviously know why this town ended up in such a sorry state too."

Yan Nanfei answered, "Of course I know."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Why?"

Yan Nanfei's eyes suddenly showed a mixture of pain and anger. After a long time, he muttered, "Because of me."

Fu Hongxue said, "Because of you? How did you turn the entire bustling town to transform into a grave?"

Yan Nanfei clamped his mouth shut.

The lines of his mouth were thin and cold; in fact, they were almost cruel. So the moment he closed his mouth, anybody could see that he would no longer discuss the matter any further.

So Fu Hongxue closed his mouth too.

But their eyes were not closed. They both saw a stallion approaching towards them from the side road. Galloping, galloping at a high speed.

The stallion was a thoroughbred, and the rider's skills was superb. By the time they saw the horse, both the rider and his horse were already in front of them.

Yan Nanfei suddenly shot out like an arrow, and did a flip midair as he leaped over the stallion's head. He was already pulling on the reins of the stallion when his feet touched the ground again.

He stood there like a nail driven into the ground; with just one hand, he managed to rein in a galloping horse.

The stallion was startled, and reared up.

The rider was so angry; he cracked his whip and lashed it in the direction of Yan Nanfei's head.

Suddenly he found himself sprawled on the ground; his perspiration-drenched face was already pale and tense with fear and terror. He stared at Yan Nanfei, stupefied.

Yan Nanfei was smiling. "Why are you such in a terrible hurry to get to your destination?" he asked.

The rider was trying to keep his temper. He had to, after witnessing Yan Nanfei's skill. He felt that he had to answer Yan Nanfei's question. "I am rushing to get to a funeral wake."

"A relative of yours died?" Yan Nanfei asked.

The rider answered, "Yes, my second uncle."

"By hurrying there, will you be able to save your uncle?"

It was a rhetorical question, for who could raise the dead?

"Nothing changes anyway, why travel in such haste?" Yan Nanfei asked.

The rider was confused, and asked, "What exactly do you want from me?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I want to buy your horse."

The rider answered, "The horse is not for sale."

Yan Nanfei reached into his pocket casually, took out a bundle of gold leaves and threw it in front of the rider. "Is this enough?"

The rider was shocked by Yan Nanfei's gesture. He stared blankly at the bundle of gold leaves. He finally gave a long sigh, and said, "A dead man cannot come back to life. Why do I need to rush to get there?"



Yan Nanfei laughed. As he was stroking the mane of the stallion, he smiled at Fu Hongxue, and said, "I know I can't get away from you, but now I have six legs."

Fu Hongxue was speechless.

Yan Nanfei guffawed, and waved good bye, "So long! I'll see you in a year's time!"

He was about to jump onto the intricately designed saddle that was on this beautiful thoroughbred. Suddenly, there was a flash of sabre light.

Fu Hongxue had already pulled out his sabre. The sabre flashed with light, and returned to its sheath.

The horse was not startled, and nobody present was injured in anyway. This flash of sabre light looked like shooting stars in the sky; shooting stars that gave people beauty and hope, not fear and horror.

But Yan Nanfei was shocked. He looked at the sabre in Fu Hongxue's hand. "I know you very seldom drawn your sabre."

Fu Hongxue grunted an agreement.

Yan Nanfei said, "Your sabre was not meant for viewing pleasure."

Fu Hongxue grunted once again.

"Then why did you pull your sabre out for no reason whatsoever?" Yan Nanfei asked.

Fu Hongxue answered, "Because of your legs."

Yan Nanfei did not understand, "My legs?"

Fu Hongxue continued, "You don't have six legs. In fact, the moment you mount this horse, you won't have even one leg."

Yan Nanfei tensed, and turned back to look at the horse. He saw blood!

Crimson red blood was flowing out. The blood did not flow out from anybody, nor the horse.

The blood was flowing out from the saddle of the horse.

The horse rider, who had been sitting on the ground all this time, suddenly jumped to his feet and sprinted away, as quickly as a flying arrow.

Fu Hongxue did not stop him, neither did Yan Nanfei; they did not even glance at the rider.

Both their eyes were glued to the horse saddle. Yan Nanfei cautiously used two fingers to lift the saddle. – Only one half of the saddle.

This intricately designed saddle had been severed into 2 halves by the flash of sabre light.

How could the horse saddle bleed?

It couldn't, obviously.

The blood was cool, and was flowing out from snakes. The snakes were in the horse saddle.

There were four poisonous snakes, and they were too cleaved into two by the flash of sabre light.

If a person sat on this horse saddle, that had holes for snakes to crawl out, whose seals had been removed, and if the four venomous snakes had crawled out and bit the legs of this person...

Would this person still have legs?

Yan Nanfei broke out in cold sweat at the very thought of this horrifying scenario.

He was still perspiring, when he heard a wretched cry. This cry was so chilling, he felt as though a sword was being stabbed into his chest.

The escaping rider had used his lightness skill, the [Swallow Pecking Water Trice], to escape, and was already about seven to eight feet away.

He suddenly gave a cry of horror, and collapsed.

That flash of sabre light earlier not only severed the saddle and cleaved the snakes, it injured the rider's heart, spleen and liver.

He collapsed onto the ground, and was writhing like snakes.

No one turned around and looked at him.

Yan Nanfei slowly released the severed horse saddle, raised his head, and gazed intently at Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue's hand was on the hilt of his sabre, and his sabre was in its sheath.

Yan Nanfei contemplated silently for a while, and suddenly sighed. "I regret very much that I was born too late, and never had the opportunity to see this."

Fu Hongxue asked, "You have never seen Ye Kai's blade?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "I regret that I never had the fortune. I..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted him, "You may not have had the fortune, but you are nevertheless also lucky. There were people who had seen his sabre in the past.."

Yan Nanfei asked, "They had all died?"

Fun Hongxue answered, "Even if their bodies are still alive, their hearts were already dead."

Yan Nanfei said, "Their hearts had died?"

Fu Hongxue said, "All who had seen him use his blade, dared not use a blade for the rest of their lives, without exception."

Yan Nanfei said, "But his blade is really just a flying knife."

Fu Hongxue replied, "A flying knife is a type of blade as well."

Yan Nanfei agreed, could only agree.

There were all sorts of knives and sabres. Every single type of sabre and knife can be used to kill.

Fu Hongxue asked, "Have you ever used a sabre?"

Yan Nanfei replied, "Never."

Fu Hongxue asked, "How many people have you seen, who do actually know how to use sabres properly?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "Not too many."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then you have no business to be talking about knives and sabres."

Yan Nanfei laughed, and said, "Perhaps I really do not have any business to be talking about knives and sabres; perhaps your sabre technique isn't unmatched under the heavens. These, I am not too sure. But I am sure about one thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "And what is that?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Now I have six legs again, but you only have two."

He gave a loud gaffaw again, and leaped onto the horse.

The horse saddle may be severed, and the snakes may be slashed, but the horse was still very much alive and alert.

The horse ran like the wind, and left behind a swirl of fine dust.

Fu Hongxue looked down at his feet; his eyes had the indescribable look of self ridicule, and whispered to himself, "You are wrong. I don't have two legs; I only have one."

There were wine tavern in every town; and every wine tavern with long histories had something that was special or unique.

The “Ten Thousand Longevity” tavern was unique in one way, and that was the exorbitant prices that it charged. Everything that was served, food or wine, were at least double the price of other taverns.

Man has many weakness. Spending tons of money for the sake of appearance was surely one of them.

This was why places that charged ridiculous prices also had ridiculously good business.

When Yan Nanfei walked out of the “Ten Thousand Longevity” tavern and looked at the horse tied outside the tavern, he could not help laughing.

Two legs were really of no match to six legs.

Every Man hopes to escape their shadow. This was certainly another of Man’s many weaknesses.

But as he was untying horse reins, he could no longer laugh.

The moment he raised his head, he saw Fu Hongxue again.

Fu Hongxue was standing across the street, and was staring at him coldly. His face was deadly pale, his eyes silently cold, his sword pitch black.

Yan Nanfei smiled.

He gave the horse a small pat and the horse trotted away. He, however was still where he was, smiling and looking at Fu Hongxue.

The horse that was worth thousands of gold, turned into swirl of dust with a mere pat of his hands.

A thousand taels. Ten thousand taels. Tens and Tens of thousand taels. What are they in his eyes? To him, they are nothing but dust.

The dust settled, and he walked across the street towards Fu Hongxue. He smiled, and said, “You still managed to catch up after all.”

Fu Hongxue gave a “humph” in reply.

Yan Nanfei gave a deep sigh and said, "It's just as well I am not a female. If not, after being chased and watched like this by you, I'd have had no choice but to marry you."

Fu Hongxue's pale face suddenly blushed red. The blush was so deep red, it was alarming. All the pores on his face contorted as though he was in deep pain.

What excruciating memory lay in his heart? Why would a simple, ordinary joke like this one cause him so much pain?

Yan Nanfei closed his mouth.

He never liked hurting other people. Everytime he hurt a person by mistake, he would feel very bad too.

They stood there face to face, under the roof of a bakery.

There was a skinny and withered old lady with two children, a girl and a boy. They were buying some cakes in the bakery. They were barely out of the bakery and the children were already bickering to eat. Though the granny was telling them that it was not good to be eating on the streets, she took out two pieces for them to share.

The children however, quarrelled even louder after they received their share of the cakes.

The little boy jumping up and down, "Why is Xiaoping's piece so much bigger than mine? I want her cake."

The little girl naturally refused so the little boy tried to scratch it from her. The little girl had no choice but to run away from him. The old granny couldn't them and could only shake her head and sighed with resignation.

The girl was not as fast and the boy was going to catch her. She ran behind Yan Nanfei and hid, pulled at Yan Nanfei's sleeve, and said, "Good uncle, please save me. He's a little robber."

The boy quipped, " This uncle won't help you. We are all men, and men stick together."

Yan Nanfei laughed at the antics of the children.

These two children may be mischievous, but they were very intelligent and very cute. Yan Nanfei also had his childhood once, but those golden times were gone, never to return. He too, had a girl playmate once, and he wondered if she was already married.

He saw something in the two children that reminded him of his childhood.

His heart was suddenly filled with warmth and nostalgia. He grabbed both the hands of the two children and said gently, "Let's quarrel no more. Uncle will buy ten cakes for each of you."

The faces of the two children lighted up, their smiles were angelic. They both start running into his embrace.

Yan Nanfei opened his arms, preparing to carry a child in each arm.

At this instant, there was a flash of sabre light.

Fu Hongxue was a person who never drawn his sabre out lightly, and yet he suddenly draw his sabre!

The sabre light flashed pass, and the cakes that were in the children's hands fell onto the ground. They had been slashed into halves.

Both children were so frightened that they started crying and ran back to their grandmother.

Yan Nanfei was also stunned. He stared at Fu Hongxue in bewilderment.

Fu Hongxue's sabre was already back in its sheath. His face was expressionless.

Yan Nanfei suddenly laughed coldly. "Now I know. Other than killing, your sabre has one more function."

Fun Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Yan Nanfei said, "You also use your sabre to frighten children."

Fu Hongxue replied coldly, "I only scare one type of children."

Yan Nanfei asked, "Which type?"

Fu Hongxue answered, "The type that kills."

Yan Nanfei was stunned once more, and turned his back slowly. The old lady was backing away with the two children. The children were no longer crying; their eyes were wide open, and they were glaring at Yan Nanfei.

It was as though their glare was filled with murderous intentions and hatred.

Yan Nanfei lowered his head. His heart beginning to sink. His eyes fell on the cakes on the ground. There were reflective bits inside the cakes.

He picked up one of the halves, and found a mechanised hollow tube filled with [Five-Poison Needles].

He suddenly leaped up like a bird, and landed in front of the old lady. "You are the Ghostly Granny?"

The old lady laughed. The wrinkled and shrivelled face, suddenly became evil and cruel. "You've heard of me. Now, that is unexpected."

Yan Nanfei gazed at her for a long time, and said calmly, "You do know that I have a habit."

Ghostly Granny said, "What habit is it?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "I never kill women."

Ghostly Granny laughed. "It's a good habit to have."

Yan Nanfei said, "You may be old, but you are still women."

Ghostly Granny let out a breath, and said, "It's too bad for you that you've never seen me when I was still young, or else...."

Yan Nanfei interrupted coldly, "... I would have still killed you."

Ghostly Granny said, "I seem to recall you just mentioning that you never killed women."



Yan Nanfei said, "You are an exception."

Ghostly Granny asked, "Why am I an exception?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Children are pure and innocent. You should not have used them. You've wrecked their lives..."

Ghostly Granny smiled again. Her smile was chilling, "Granny loves the children, and the children love to help their Granny with her work. What business is it of yours?"

Yan Nanfei shut his mouth.

He was no longer bear to discuss this matter. His hand was already gripping his sword sword.

A bright red sword, red as fresh blood!

Ghostly Granny cackled in laughter. "Other people are afraid of your Wild Rose Sword, but I..."

She didn't finish her sentence, but threw a bag of sugared pastries heavily on the ground.

There was a suddenly clap of thunderous explosion. There was dust flying high, acrid smoke everywhere and sparks flying about.

Yan Nanfei leaped into the air and somersaulted two feet back.

By the time the smoke dispersed and the dust settled, Ghostly Granny and the two children had vanished. There was however, a large hole left in the ground.

A crowd gathered around to watch, but soon scattered.

Yan Nanfei was still standing there, shell-shocked. After a good while, he turned and faced Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue was as cold as snow.

Yan Nanfei let out a long sigh, and said, "You are right once again."

Fu Hongxue said, "I'm rarely wrong."

Yan Nanfei said, "The children are innocent. They must have been kidnapped by Ghostly Granny when they were tiny."

In the dark of the night, and babies in cloth bundles...

A shrivelled old lady knocking on the door in the middle of the night...

Grieving parents, pitiful children...

Yan Nanfei said sorrowfully, "She must have used all kinds of methods to have taught the children nothing but evil and hatred from a young and tender age."

Fu Hongxue said, "That's why you should not have let escape."

Yan Nanfei said, "I did not suspect that fire seeds from Jiangnan's Thunderclap Hall could be hidden in that the bag of sugared pastries."

Fu Hongxue said, "You should have thought of that possibility. If the cakes could contain the [Five-Poison Needles], they could also contain the [Thunderclap Seed]."

Yan Nanfei asked, "You expected something like this would occur?"

Fu Hongxue did not deny it.

Yan Nanfei asked, "Since you are of the opinion that that I should not have let her go, why didn't you strike her down?"

Fu Hongxue answered coldly, "That is because her target was you, not me. Besides, I never expect you to be so dumb."

Yan Nanfei looked intently at him, and laughed bitterly. "Perhaps it is not that I'm too dumb, but it is that you are too sharp."

Fu Hongxue, "Oh?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Right to this very moment, I still find it hard to understand how you detect the toxic mist amidst the smoke and the poisonous snakes in the saddle?"

Fu Hongxue was silent for a long time. He calmly said, "There are many ways to kill a person. Assassination is but one of them, and yet this way of killing is the most fearsome of them all.

Yan Nanfei answered, "I know that."

Fu Hongxue continued, "Then do you know how many assassination methods are there?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "I don't know."

Fu Hongxue asked again, "Do you know how many people in the last three centuries have died undeserved deaths because of successful assassinations?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "I don't know."

Fu Hongxue said, "At least 538 people."

Yan Nanfei asked, "You counted?"

Fu Hongxue replied, "I counted. It took me seven years of time and effort to get this exact number."

Yan Nanfei could not stop himself from asking the obvious question, "Why did you waste so much time to find the exact answer to this trivial question?"

Fu Hongxue replied, "If I had not taken the trouble to do so, I would have already died at least ten times , and you three times."

Yan Nanfei let out a small breath. He was going to say something, but stopped himself.

Fu Hongxue continued "These 538 people that I mentioned, they were all highly skilled members of the pugilistic fraternity. They were all killed by people who were normally not their match in martial arts."

Yan Nanfei said, "They only succeed because the assassination methods were so lowly and ingenious."

Fu Hongxue nodded. "There may have been 538 deaths, but there were only 483 assassins."

Yan Nanfei said, "Some were victims of the same assassin."

Fu Hongxue nodded again. "Also, different assassins might shared the similar methods."

Yan Nanfei said, "I would have imagine so."

Fu Hongxue said, "In all, the assassins had used 227 different methods."

Yan Nanfei said, "It goes without saying that these 227 methods must be the most malicious and ingenious."

Fu Hongxue replied, "Obviously so."

Yan Nanfei asked, "Of these, how many of them do you know?"

Fu Hongxue answered, "227."

Yan Nanfei let out another breath, and said, "Originally, I know none of these methods."

Fu Hongxue said, "At the very least, you now know three of them."

Yan Nanfei answered, "More than three methods!"

Fu Hongxue, "More than three methods?"

Yan Nanfei smiled, "Do you know the number of assassination attempts I had survived in the last six months?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Yan Nanfei said, "39 attempts, not counting the three that you witnessed."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Their methods were all different?"

Yan Nanfei replied, "Not only were they totally different, they all came unexpected. But I'm still alive today."

It was now Fu Hongxue's turn to be speechless.

Yan Nanfei laughed and walked into a small road that was intersecting the major street that they were on. There was a high mansion. There were floral scents emitting from the upper floors.

What floral scent was it?

Could it be that of wild roses?

There was a high mansion.  
There were windows in the mansion.  
There was moon outside the window.  
There were flowers beneath the moon.  
Flowers were wild roses.  
The moon was bright moon.

There was no lamp. The moonlight came in from the window, and shone at the wild roses that were beside Yan Nanfei.

He had more than wild roses by his side, he also have a person pricked by wild roses.

Tonight, of all nights..

The moon is like a liquid, two people leaning on each other.  
There were countless burdens to be shared.  
There were never-ending words of love to be said.

The night was deep, and men were getting intoxicated.

Yan Nanfei was however very much alert, his eyes were still clear as the bright moon. But the expression on his face seemed as though he had been pricked by the thorns of wild roses.

Wild roses had thorns, but what about the bright moon? The bright moon did have a heart, that was why the moon would lend its rays to illuminate mankind. The name of this lady was \*Mingyue Xin.

*[\*Mingyue Xin literally translates as “Heart of the Bright Moon”. She is a recurring character, and the moon is often used as a pun/metaphor for her. Keep this in mind henceforth when the “bright moon” or “the heart of the bright moon” comes up. The author may be just be literally describing about the bright moon hanging in the sky. Then again, the author may actually be referring to Mingyue Xin.]*

The deeper the night,  
The clearer the moon,  
The more beautiful she is,  
However, the expression on his face was even more hurt.

She gazed intently at him for a long time. Finally she had to break the silence. She whispered, “What is in your mind?”

Yan Nanfei remained quiet for a long time, before he answered softly, “I’m thinking of people. Two people in particular.”

Mingyue Xin’s voice was even gentler now, “Am I one of the two?”

Yan Nanfei answered, “No.”

His voice became ice-cold, “You are not either of the two people I’m thinking of.”

The beauty was pricked once again, but she did not withdraw. She asked, “Who are they then?”

Yan Nanfei answered, “One of them is Fu Hongxue.”

Mingyue Xin asked, “Fu Hongxue? The person who was waiting for you at Phoenix Settlement?”

Yan Nanfei nodded.

Mingyue Xin asked, “He is your enemy, isn’t he?”

Yan Nanfei answered, “No.”

Mingyue Xin asked, “Is he your friend then?”

Yan Nanfei said, "No, he's not my friend either."

He suddenly laughed, and said, "You'd never guess in a million years why he was waiting for me at Phoenix Settlement."

Mingyue Xin asked, "Why was he waiting for you?"

Yan Nanfei said, "He was waiting to kill me."

Mingyue Xin let out a small breath, and said, "But he didn't kill you."

Yan Nanfei was still smiling, but his expression was mocking, "Not only did he not kill me, he even saved me three times."

Mingyue Xin sighed once more, and said, "We women will never understand these kind of men."

Yan Nanfei said, "Woman don't understand man in the first place."

Mingyue Xin turned her head towards the window and stared at the moon hanging outside the window. She asked, "Who else were you thinking of?"

Yan Nanfei's expression turned from gibe back to pain, and said slowly, "A man I want to kill, but I know I would never be able to kill him."

Seeing his pain, her eyes dimmed; even the moon outside also dimmed.

A dark cloud floated quietly across the sky, and covered the moon.

She got up silently, and whispered, "I'm leaving now, you should be sleeping soon."

Yan Nanfei did not raise his head. "You are leaving?"

Mingyue Xin said, "I know that I should be with you when you are feeling down, but..."

"But you had to leave anyway, even though this room is amongst the \*wind and dust, you had never allowed guests to stay overnight. You are giving me face by letting me remain here," Yan Nanfei interrupted.

*[\*“Wind and Dust” is a euphemistic term referring to prostitution. Yan Nanfei’s present location can be left to the reader’s imagination.]*

Mingyue Xin looked at him, and her eyes also began to show the pain. She suddenly turned around, and said, “Perhaps I never should have asked you to stay. Perhaps you never should have come.” Her voice was calm, yet not without a hint of resentment.

Man in an empty room. The empty room thicked with loneliness. Outside the window, raindrops was like the chord of a qin. It was slowly nearing, louder and denser.

The rain was heavy and came very fast. The wild roses on the balcony were ravaged by the torrent of raindrops.

Across the street, at the corner, there stood a man who could not be ravaged. Nothing could devastate him; not his person, not his determination.

When Yan Nanfei pushed open the windows, he saw this man.

“He’s still here,” Yan Nanfei mumbled to himself. The storm was worsening, but this man stood there, motionless. Even if the raindrops were like hundreds and thousands of little daggers raining down on him, he would not retreat. Other than smiling bitterly to himself, Yan Nanfei had no other appropriate response to this sight. “Fu Hongxue, Fu Hongxue, what kind of a human are you?”

There was a slight breeze, and the raindrops hit his face. They were cold, and their chill wormed their way into his heart.

However, there was a sudden rush of hot blood in his heart. Pounding hard with emotion, it rushed through the icy raindrops, over the high wall and falling in front of Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue seemed far away. It was as though he wasn’t experiencing this downpour, and didn’t see Yan Nanfei.

Yan Nanfei was only under the rain for a short while, but his clothes were quickly drenched through. But if Fu Hongxue remained silent, so would he as well.



Fu Hongxue's gaze fell on him at last. He said coldly, "It's raining heavily outside."

Yan Nanfei said, "I know."

Fu Hongxue continued, "You should not have come out."

Yan Nanfei laughed, and asked, "If you can be standing under the pouring rain, why cannot I do the same?"

Fu Hongxue only said three words, "You certainly can."

With that, he turned his gaze away. It was obvious that he was terminating the conversation.

But Yan Nanfei refused to let the dialogue end. He continued speaking, "Of course I can stand under the rain. Anybody has the right to stand under the rain if he so chooses."

Fu Hongxue was silent. He was again as though he was physically somewhere far far away.

Yan Nanfei yelled, "But I didn't come out here specially to get drenched."

His voice was just too loud. It was even louder than the hundreds of thousands of raindrops that were hitting the tiled rooftop.

Fu Hongxue was undoubtedly not deaf. He finally asked nonchalantly, "Then what are you doing outside?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I want to tell you something. A secret."

Fu Hongxue's eyes brightened. "You are now prepared to tell me?"

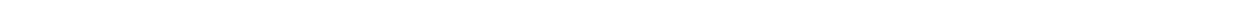
Yan Nanfei nodded. Fu Hongxue asked, "But you were originally intending to take that secret to your grave?"

Yan Nanfei nodded in admission, and said, "I had made up my mind not to tell anybody, ever."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Then why are you telling me now?" Yan Nanfei stared at him, at the raindrops on his face, at his pale face, and answered, "I'm going to tell you now, because I've suddenly realized one thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "And what is that?"

Yan Nanfei laughed. He said, unconcerned, "You are not human. Not human at all."



## Chapter 4 – The Thumb of the Black Hand

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What was he then, if not human? Was he a wild animal? Ghost or demon? Block of wood? Or immortal Buddha?

Perhaps, not any of that. It merely was the uncannily ability to perform deeds that were beyond the limits of normal beings and at the same time able to endure far more than any normal being.

Yan Nanfei had a very good explanation, “Even if you are human, you are at the most an inhuman human.”

Fu Hongxue smiled, he actually smiled. Although he did not laugh out loud, his eyes did indeed have the hint of laughter.

This was already something very rare, like a ray of sunshine suddenly appearing in middle of a violent storm.

Yan Nanfei looked at him and suddenly sighed, “What I didn’t expect is that an inhuman human like you could also smile.”

Fu Hongxue quipped, “Not only could smile, but could listen as well.”

Yan Nanfei said, “Then, just follow me.”

Fu Hongxue asked, “Where to?”

Yan Nanfei replied, “To somewhere without rain, to somewhere with wine”

In the small mansion, there was wine and there were bright lights. In such a chilly cold rainy night, it might be even warmer than Fu Hongxue’s smile. But Fu Hongxue only lifted his head and with a single look, the laughter in his eyes immediately froze.

He coldly said, “This place might be for you but it is not for me.”

Yan Nanfei said, “You are not going in?”

“Certainly not”, Fu Hongxue replied.

Yan Nanfei said, “If I can go in, why can’t you do the same?”

Fu Hongxue said, “Because you are not me, and I am not you.”

It was because you are not me, you would never understand my pain and sufferings.

This was left unspoken, neither was there the need. Yan Nanfei had seen his pain, his face was already distorted with this pain.

This place was just only a brothel, a place where people sought pleasures and joys. Why would it cause him such intense pain and suffering? Could it be that he had previously endured great pain and sufferings in such a place?

Yan Nanfei suddenly asked, “Did you see the person accompanying me to Phoenix Settlement, the one who carried my zither?”

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Yan Nanfei continued, “I know that you had not seen it, because you never drink and never look at women.”

He stared at Fu Hongxue, and slowly said, “Is it because those two things had hurt you in the past?”

Fu Hongxue had not moved, neither did he speak but every muscle in his face was already taut. Yan Nanfei’s words were like a sharp needle, stabbing into his heart.

- Couldn’t a place of happiness also have deep and painful memories?
- Without happiness, how could there be pain and sufferings?
- Isn’t happiness and pain separated just by a thin thread?

Yan Nanfei shut his mouth. He didn’t want to ask further, he couldn’t bear to ask further.

At this moment, two people suddenly flew out behind the high walls. One of them hit the ground with a “PU” and didn’t move an inch after that. The

other however had already made his way up the mansion with the exquisite lightness skill, [Swallow Pecking Water Trice].

When Yan Nanfei came out, the windows were still open and the lamps were still bright. Under the lamp light, he could only made out a flash of delicatly agile shadow before it disappeared through the window.

The one on the ground, was a small, thin blackclothed old man. Long white beard and a wax yellow complexion. He had stopped breathing by the time he hit the ground.

When Yan Nanfei realised that he was dead, he flew up the mansion in the greatest haste, straight through the window.

By the time he passed through the window, Fu Hongxue was already inside.

There was nobody in the house, only a wet footprint. A delicate footprint. The swallow-like shadow was obviously a woman.

Yan Nanfei creased his brows and mumbled, "Could it be her?"

Fu Hongxue asked, "Who is she?"

Yan Nanfei answered, "Mingyue Xin."

Fu Hongxue coldly, "There's no moon the sky, and the bright moon has no heart. How could there then be a Mingyue Xin, the heart of the bright moon?"

Yan Nanfei sighed, with a bitter laugh, "You were wrong. I was wrong too. Only now I do I realize that the bright moon does have a heart." The heartless one was the wild rose. The wild rose at the horizon.

Fu Hongxue said, "Mingyue Xin is the owner here?"

Yan Nanfei nodded, still silent. Outside, someone had already came knocking on the door.

The door was not latched properly, a redcheeked girl with a pair of huge eyes walked in. Dressed in a thin spring gown, carrying a food basket on her left hand and on her right, was a wine jar with a still unbroken seal.

With her pair of nimble huge eyes, she looked at Fu Hongxue for a long while before suddenly asking, "Are you the honoured guest my mistress is expecting?"

Fu Hongxue did not understand, nor did Yan Nanfei.

The young girl continued, "Our mistress said that an honoured guest is coming and had instructed us to prepare food and wine. But you don't look the part of the honoured guest."

She seemed reluctant to even take another glance at Fu Hongxue. For while talking she had already turned around to tidy up the table and arrange the cutlery.

The person just now was indeed Mingxue Xing.

The blackclothed old man was plotting to assassinate Yan Nanfei. She had killed the old man without revealing herself, most likely to lure Fu Hongxue into this mansion.

Yan Nanfei smiled, "It looks like her ability to invite guests greatly surpassed mine."

Fu Hongxue pulled a long face and coldly said, "Too bad that I am not the type of honoured guest she expected."

Yan Nanfei reasoned, "But since you are already here, then there is no point not staying."

Fu Hongxue retorted, "Since I am already here, then why did you still waste such words?"

Yan Nanfei smiled again, walked over and broke open the clay seal of the wine jar. The fragrance greeted the nostrils immediately.

"Good wine." He laughed. "Even when I was here, I didn't get to drink such good wine."

The young girl was pouring wine, from the wine jar to the wine pot and then from the wine pot to the wine cup.

Yan Nanfei remarked, "It looks like she not only recognise you, but she clearly also knows what kind of person you are."

The wine cup was full to the brim. He drained it in a one glup, then turned to face Fu Hongxue and slowly said, "I had unfulfilled wishes because one person is still not dead."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Who is that?"

Yan Nanfei said, "He is the kind that deserved to die."

Fu Hongxue asked again, "You want to kill him?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Every single day and night."

Fu Hongxue was silent for a long time before calmly said, "People who deserved to die would die sooner or later. Why must you kill him with your own hands?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Because apart from me, no one else knows that he deserved to die."

Fu Hongxue questioned, "Who exactly is this person?"

Yan Nanfei replied, "Gongzi Yu!"

It was suddenly very dead still, even the young girl who was serving wine had momentarily forgotten to pour wine!

Gongzi Yu!

These three characters alone was enough to frighten people into submission.

The raindrops trickled down from the roof like a curtain of beads.

Fu Hongxue faced the windows for a long time before abruptly asked, "In the last 40 years, how many people could be considered as true heroes."

Yan Nanfei answered, "Three persons."

Fu Hongxue, "Only three?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I didn't include you, you..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted him, calmly said, "I know I am not a hero. I know only how to kill people, but not how to save them."

Yan Nanfei continued, "I did know that you are not a hero, simply because you have no intention to be one."

Fu Hongxue said, "The three you mentioned are Shen Lang, Li XunHuan and Ye Kai?"

Yan Nanfei nodded, "Only those three are fit to be called true heroes. No one in the martial world could dispute that. The first decade belongs to Shen Lang, XiaoLi Flying Dagger dominated the second decade and in the third decade Ye Kai took over."

Fu Hongxue said, "In the last ten years?"

Yan Nanfei laughed coldly, "The martial world of this age without a doubt belongs to Gongzi Yu." The winecup was full again, he again quaffed it down in one go. "He not only have close ties with the Imperial family, he is also Shen Lang's only successor. He is famous, charming and suave. Excellent in literary arts and unmatched martial skills. A great swordman!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yet you want to kill him."

Yan Nanfei slowly nodded his head, "I want to kill him but it is not for fame, neither it is for vengeance."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Then, for what reason."

"For justice and righteousness, because I know his secret. Only I....", said Yan Nanfei.

He was draining his third toast when the wine cup suddenly crushed in his hands with a "BO".

His complexion had changed, changed into a kind of ghostly dead greenish hue.



Fu Hongxue took just one look at him and shot up like wind. First, jamming a pair of silver chopstick into his mouth and then without delay sealing all the acupoints leading to his heart.

Yan Nanfei's mouth was already clamping shut but he couldn't bite through the pair of silver chopsticks, thus leaving a small gap. Through this gap, Fu Hongxue was then able to pour a vial of antidote into his mouth.

With his fingers, he lightly tapped a couple of times on Yan Nanfei's forehead.

The silver chopsticks came popping out, and the antidote was already in his belly.

The young girl was already frightened to death and was about to slip away quietly. But before she could do so, she felt a pair of eyes, sharper and colder than any knife edge already boring into her.

The wine pot and wine cup were made of pure silver, the clay seal on the wine jar shown no signs of tampering.

But Yan Nanfei was poisoned, already deeply poisoned after only three cups of wine. How did the poison get into the wine?

Fu Hongxue smashed the wine jar, the bottom was exposed. Under the bright lamp, something was shining like a star at the bottom of the wine jar.

It was a three inch long needle. The jar bottom was only slightly thicker than an inch. By pushing the needle into the bottom of the wine jar, the poison on the needle would then dissolved into the wine.

He had found the answer to the question within seconds. But there was more than one question. The poison is from the needle, but where did the needle come from?

Fu Hongxue's eyes was as cold as a knife edge, calmly asked, "You brought this jar of wine?"

The young girl nodded her head, her apple cheeks were already white with fear.

Fu Hongxue asked again, "Where did you bring it from?"

Young Girl quivering, "This is our own wine, which were all stored in the basement."

Fu Hongxue again, "Why did you pick this particular jar?"

Young Girl replied, "It was not me who picked the wine. Our mistress told us to serve the very best for the honoured guest. That jar of wine was the best of the best!"

Fu Hongxue followed up, "Where is she?"

Young Girl replied, "She was changing because..."

Before she could finished, someone from outside already continued for her, "...because when I returned just now, I was also completely drenched"

Her voice was pleasant, her smile was attractive. Her bearing was graceful and elegant while she dressed very softly in pale hues.

Perhaps she could not be regarded as a beauty who could break up dynasties or take over cities with a bat of her eyelids. But when she walked in, she was like a light ray of moon shinning through the window in a lifeless night. Emitting a sense of unspeakable beauty and a sense of indescribable tranquil happiness.

Her eyes were gentle, just like the moon in spring. But they became much keener upon seeing the poison needle in Fu Hongxue's hand.

"Since you are able to find this needle, then you would surely know its origins." Her voice had also become much more incisive. "This is Tang Family of Sichuan's unique hidden projectile. The dead old man outside is the disgrace of the Tang Family, Tang Xiang. He had been inside here before, since this mansion was hardly a heavily guarded place. In fact, the wine storage at the basement wasn't even locked."

Fu Hongxue didn't seem to hear a single word of what she said. He only stared at her blankly, his pale face turned into a crimson red, his breathing ragged and urgent. Torrents of cold sweat had replaced, the rain that had

only just dried on his face. Mingyue Xin looked up and only then saw these odd changes on his face. She exclaimed loudly, "You are poisoned as well?!"

Fu Hong held both his hands tightly together, but still he couldn't stop himself from trembling. Without warning, he flipped in the air and shot out of the window like an arrow. The young girl looked in surprise as he vanished from view. Raising her eyebrows, "This person seems to have quite a few problems"

Mingyue Xin exhaled lightly, "Indeed, his sickness is very severe."

Young Girl said, "What sickness is that?"

Mingyue Xin answered her, "Sickness of the heart."

Young Girl blinked, "How could his heart be ill?"

Mingyue Xin was silent for a long while before sighing again, "It is because he is a man of great grief."

Only the wind and the rain, no light.

The town in darkness was just like a barren wilderness.

Fu Hongxue had collapsed beside an alley sewer, his body curled with spasms and was vomiting nonstop.

He perhaps did not vomit out anything but the pain and sorrow in his heart. He was indeed sick.

To him, this sickness was not only pain and suffering that he could not be freed from, but also a source of shame and humiliation. His sickness would manifest itself whenever he was in extreme anger or sorrow. He would then hide away and torture himself the most cruelly.

All because he hated himself, hated himself for having such sickness.

The icy rain pounded his body like lashes of whip. His heart was bleeding, his hands were also bleeding. He dug hard into the gravel, shoving the mixture of blood and dirt into his mouth.

He had a deep fear that he would wailed and howled like a wild animal. He much rather bleed than to let others see his suffering and humiliation.

Unfortunately, someone came into this empty alley.

The delicate shadow slowly walked over and stopped in front of him. He didn't see her person, only her feet. A pair of dainty and elegant feet. A pair of soft satin shoes, that totally matched the rest of her attire.

The colours she wore were always very soft, very pale. Pale like the moon in spring.

Fu Hongxue suddenly let out an animalistic howl, like a tiger with a belly wound.

He would much rather anyone else in the world but her, to see his suffering and humiliation.

He struggled to get up, but somehow every single muscle in his body shook violently in convulsion.

She sighed, sighing as she bended on her knees.

He heard her sigh, and felt a pair of icy hands lightly carassing his face.

Then he lost conscious. All his sufferings and humiliation were instantly erased.

When he came to, he was already back in that small mansion.

She was looking at him by the bedside. Her gown was pale like the moon in spring, but orbs in her eyes were shinning like the stars in autumn.

Seeing that pair of eyes, he felt another spasm deep inside his heart trembling like a zither chord.

Her expression was however very cool, softly said, "You need not say anything. The only reason I brought you back here is to save Yan Nanfei, the poison had already worked deeply into him."

Fu Hongxue shut his eyes. Not only to escape her gaze but also to hide the pain in his eyes.

Mingyue Xin continued, "To my knowledge, there are at the most only three person in the martial world who can counteract the poison from Tang Family. And you are one of them."

Fu Hongxue shown no reactions at all. But all in an instant, he already stood up, facing the window and away from her.

He was still wearing his original clothes, his sabre still by his side. These two things put him somewhat at ease, thus he didn't shot out of the window this time. Calmly he asked, "Is he still here?"

"Still here, just right inside."

"I go in, you wait here."

She stood there, watched him walked in slowly. Seeing his walking posture, the orbs in her eyes could not help but to betray a kind of unexplainable grief and anguish.

It was quite some time before she heard him from beyond the door curtain, "Antidote is on the table." His voice was still ice cold, "He is no longer deeply poisoned. After three days, he will regain conscious. After seven days, he will recover."

"But you can't leave now!" She said in a great hurry, as if knowing that he was going to leave immediately, "Even if you are very unwilling to see me, you still shouldn't leave now!"

A light breeze from the window and the curtain on the door passively moved. Inside, there was no response at all.

Had he left?

"I do understand you, and also know that you had some very painful memories. The person who had hurt you deeply in the past must have looked very much like me." Mingyue Xin said very firmly, "But you must be clear on one thing: she is she, she is not me, nor anyone else."

So there is no need to escape, nobody needs to escape. The last sentence was left unsaid, for she believed that he would certainly understand her meaning.

The breeze was still blowing and the curtain was still wavering. He had not left!

She heard his breathing and right away said, "If you really want him to live one more year, you must agree to do two things."

Finally he opened his mouth, "What are they?"

"You must not leave for the next seven days." She blinks and continued, "At noon, you must also accompany me onto the streets to observe a few people."

"What kind of people?"

"The kind that absolutely would not allow Yan Nanfei to live three more days."

Noon.

A horse carriage stopped outside the backdoor behind the rear garden, the window screens were all drawn down.

"Why must we go by carriage?"

"Because I want you to see them without being seen by them." Mingyue Xin unexpectedly smiled a little, "I know that you don't wish to see me too, so I had brought a mask."

The mask she wore was one of the Laughing Buddha. The plump round face with an ear to ear doll-like grin, contrasted with her slim and slender waist, looked absolutely ridiculous.

Even so, Fu Hongxue did not give her a single look, the pale white hand was still tightly holding that pitch black sabre. In his eyes, there was already nothing that could make him smile.

Behind the mask, the pair of orbs in Mingyue Xin's eyes was locked tightly on to him. Abruptly she asked, "Don't you want to know who is the first person I am bringing you to see?"

Fu Hongxue did not respond.

Mingyue Xin answered herself, "It is Du Lei. Thunder Wind Sabre, Du Lei."

Fu Hongxue did not respond.

Mingyue Xin exhaled, "I guess you have been already out of touch with the martial world for too long and don't even know about someone like him."

Fu Hongxue finally opened his mouth again, coldly said, "Why must I know about him?"

Mingyue Xin replied, "Because he was also one of the persons in the List.

Fu Hongxue, "What list?"

Mingyue Xin, "The martial world's "Hall of Fame" list.

Fu Hongxue turned even paler.

He knew that in the martial world, anyone who had made a name for themselves, certainly would not bow to anyone else.

Years ago, Bai Xiaosheng's [Weapons List] appraised all top pugilists under the heavens. Although it had been very fair handed, still it caused a long succession of killings. In later years, some had speculated that he was intentionally stirring up chaos in the martial world.

What about the present [Hall of Fame]? Could it also have some sinister ulterior motives?

Mingyue Xin said, "It is said that the List was put together by Gongzhi Yu himself. On the List there is a total of thirteen names."

Fu Hongxue sneered, "His own name is of course not on the List."

Mingyue Xin confirmed, "You are certainly right."

Fu Hongxue's eyes flashed and asked again, "What about Ye Kai?"

Mingyue Xin answered, "Ye Kai's name isn't there too. Maybe it is because he had completely severed his ties with the martial world, already a man above Man, already a cloud above Heaven." Fu Hongxue, his eyes seems to have gone somewhere far away.

In the far-away place, a person danced without care in the smoothing cool breeze, almost floating in the wind.

Mingyue Xin said, "I know that Ye Kai is your only friend, even you don't have news of him?"

Fu Hongxue's eyes instantly snapped back, as grim as the sabre's edge and callously said, "I have no friends at all, not a single one."

Mingyue Xin sighed quietly in her heart again before returning to the topic, "Why didn't you ask me if your name is in the List?"

Fu Hongxue didn't ask, because there is simply no need to.

Mingyue Xin said, "Maybe it is not necessary to ask. Your name is of course on the List, but so is Yan Nanfei's!"

Mingyue Xin hesitated before continuing, "Although it had been stressed that the List isn't ranked in any order, but a list of thirteen names would naturally have some sort of order."

Fu Hongxue finally gave in and asked, "Who is the first name?"

Mingyue Xin, "Yan Nanfei!"

Fu Hongxue's hand on the sabre tightened momentarily before slowly relaxing.

Mingyue Xin said, "You could now understand why while as long as he is in martial world, he would never have a day of peace and quiet."

Fu Hongxue did not reply, the carriage stopped, stopped right opposite a tall buliding.



The restaurant was 10 feet tall.

"I know that Du Lei has his afternoon meal here everyday, always leaving around this hour." Mingyue Xin said, "He ate the same thing everyday, four side dishes, two bowls of rice and a bottle of wine. His menu had never yet changed at all."

Fu Hongxue's pale face still show no expression at all, but the orbs of his eyes was already contracting.

He knew that he had yet again met a fearsome opponent.

There were numerous highly skilled pugilists in the martial world, numbering in the hundreds and thousands. But there were only thirteen persons on the List. These thirteen persons certainly were the most fearsome of all.

Mingyue Xin lifted the window screen up slightly and quickly spied outside. Suddenly she exclaimed, "He is coming out."

The sun was at its zenith.

When Du Lei stepped out of the restaurant, his feet had stepped right on his shadow.

On his feet, he wore a pair of soft soled shoes costing eighteen taels, they were still very new.

Whenever he stepped on his own shadow with new shoes, he always had this strange impulse to strip off his shoes and all his clothes, and then ran off hollering crazily in the center of the town.

He of course couldn't do such things because he was already famous, very famous.

Presently all his actions were as precise as the night watchman's drum.

No matter where he went, no matter how long he had stayed, he would arise and have his meals punctually everyday. Even the dishes were also exactly the same.

At times, it drove him crazy, but he was nonetheless not willing to change one bit.

All because he hoped that others would think of him as a very exact and efficient person. He knows that everyone had a certain respect and admiration for such a person. This was his greatest pride and joy.

Seventeen years of harsh training, five years of tough struggle, forty-three big and small bloody battles. What he had hoped to achieve was just that.

He must make himself believed, believed that he was no longer that barefooted street urchin.

The sabre set with precious jade was gleaming under the sunlight, on the streets many were sizing up that sabre of his, opposite in a pitch black horse carriage, two pairs of eyes seemed to be staring at him.

Recently, he had gotten used to people staring at him to size him up. Everyone could get used to it.

But today he suddenly felt ill at ease again, liked a naked girl among a large group of men.

Could it be that the two pairs of eyes in the carriage across the street had pierced his golden plated outer shell, and seen that barefooted street urchin?

Cleave the carriage open in one single move and poke out the two pair of eyes!

That was the kind of impulse he suddenly felt, but he did no such thing. He hadn't come all the way here for these kind of trouble.

Recently, he had also learnt to endure.

He didn't even look once in the direction, and walked back to his inn along the sunny long street. Every step he took was as exact as that of an old tailor taking measurements of a young girl. Not an inch more, not an inch less, exactly 2.3 inches.

He hoped that others would be able to understand his sabre was just as exact.

Mingyue Xin exhaled lightly, "What do you think of him?"

Fu Hongxue said coldly, "Even if he doesn't die within three years, he certainly would have turned into a lunatic by then."

Mingyue Xin sighed, "Too bad, right now he isn't insane yet..."

The horse carriage stopped again, opposite the "Top Fragrance".

"Top Fragrance" is a very big teahouse with people from all walks of life. The bigger the teahouse, the more people in the teahouse.

Mingyue Xin inched up the window screen again, allowing Fu Hongxue to take a long good look before asking, "What did you see?"

Fu Hongxue said, "People."

Mingyue Xin, "How many?"

Fu Hongxue, "Seven."

It was now the peak hour and business was good, there were at least one or two hundred people inside the teahouse. Why did he see only seven?

Mingyue Xin didn't find it puzzling at all, in fact her eyes shone with respect and asked again, "Which are the seven you saw?"

The seven Fu Hongxue saw were: the two chess players, the one peeling peanuts, the monk, the pockmarked man, the young songstress and lastly the fat man who was snoozing on the table.

These seven people were scattered all over the teahouse and didn't look special in any way.

Why did he not see the other people but these seven particular people?

Mingyue Xin again wasn't puzzled by his answer, on the contrary her admiration grew. Sighing softly, "I know your sabre is fast, but your eyes are even faster."

Fu Hongxue added, "Actually, seeing just one is enough."

He was looking at a person.

The snoozing fat man had now awaken. He yawned and poured himself a cup of tea to rinse his mouth. He spat that wash of tea onto the floor with a "PU" and dirtied the trouser leg of someone by the side. He hurriedly bent down with apologies and wiped the trouser leg with his sleeves.

If a man was too fat, his actions would naturally be a little silly and funny.

But as Fu Hongxue looked at him, the orbs in his eyes contracted exactly the same way as he looked at Du Lei just now.

Did he regard the fatty as another fearsome opponent?

Mingyue Xin asked, "You recognise that person?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

"But you take great notice of him," persisted Mingyue Xin.

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Mingyue Xin said, "Have you notice anything special about him?"

Fu Hongxue held his silence for a long while before he slowly answered, "This man has a murderous aura!"

Mingyue Xin said, "Murderous aura?"

"Only an expert who had killed countless times would carry such an aura," Fu Hongxue's grip on his sabre tighten.

Mingyue Xin baited, "But he looked nothing more than silly fatty."

“That is only his cover, similar to the sheath of a sword” Fu Hongxue sneered.

Mingyue Xin sighed yet again, “It looks like your eye is sharper than your sabre.”

Evidently, she recognised this person, moreover she also knew a lot about his background.

Fu Hongxue asked, “Who is he?”

“He is the Thumb.” Mingyue Xin answered

“Thumb?” Fu Hongxue queried

Mingyue Xin explained, “Do you know about a very fearsome secret organisation that appeared in the martial world during recent years.”

“What is this organisation’s name?” Fu Hongxue followed up.

“Blackhand!” Mingyue Xin announced.

Fu Hongxue had never heard of it, but still he felt some sort of unexplained pressure.

Mingyue Xin said, “Presently, in the martial world there are not many people who know about the inner workings of this organisation because its dealings are totally underground, nothing it does can be seen by the light of day.”

Fu Hongxue said, “What does it deal in?”

Mingyue Xin said, “Kidnappings, extortions and assassinations.”

As a hand has five fingers, this organisation has five heads.

This fat man is the Thumb, Thumb of the Blackhand!

The horse carriage continued its way, window screens already drawn down.

Mingyue Xin suddenly asked, "In a hand, which finger has the greatest strength?"

"The thumb," Fu Hongxue replied.

Mingyue Xin, "Which finger is the most agile?" .

"The index finger," Fu Hongxue supplied.

Mingyue Xin said, "Thus, in Blackhand it is the Thumb and the Index Finger that are responsible for assassinations."

The Thumb is fearful because he had learnt the [Destructive Virgin Art of 13 Heroes] which usually can't be mastered by most in a lifetime.

He managed to do so because he was originally an eunuch in the palace and was trained from young by several grandmasters in the Inner Palace.

The Index Finger had an even more complicated background. He is said to have worked a stint as an usher monk in Shaolin Temple, as a six-sack elder in Beggar Sect and also had been a hall master of the 12 Docks in Jiangnan's Fengwei clan.

They both had a team working under them, each and every one of the team had some special skill. Furthermore they had worked together seamlessly for a long time. Thus they had not failed once in their assassination operations.

Mingyue Xin said, "However, these two were not the most fearful person in the organisation."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then who?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Ring Finger, also known as the Nameless Finger." In a hand, the most clumsy finger is the nameless finger.

Fu Hongxue said, "Why is the Nameless Finger so fearful?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Precisely because he is nameless."

Fu Hongxue agreed.

Being a famous big shot in the martial world had its advantages, but on many occasions nameless persons were often more terrifying. It was so because it was only after they had a knife in your chest before you realised how fearful they were.

Mingyue Xin said, "Nobody in the martial world knows Nameless Finger's identity, much less seen his face."

Fu Hongxue said, "Not even you?"

Mingyu Xin forced a smile, "Perhaps I too, must wait till his knife was in my chest before I know."

Fu Hongxue was silent, only after a very long while he asked again, "Are we still checking on anyone else?"

Mingyue Xin did not reply directly, "This small town originally was not a very lively place, but many unfamiliar faces have arrived during the last few days."

But now, these faces were no longer unfamiliar to her, because she had thoroughly investigated the background and habits of each and every one of them.

Fu Hongxue was not surprised.

He had long realised that she definitely wasn't the delicate and naive woman she resembled. Her pair of slender and beautiful hands wielded a force of tremendous strength, far stronger than anyone imagined.

Mingyue Xin said, "I had investigated and confirmed the background of nearly all of them, with one exception."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

Before she could answer, the horse pulling the carriage suddenly neighed loudly and reared up. The carriage tilted violently and almost overturned.

Her person was already out of the compartment, only to see a man dressed in a green gown and white leggings directly under the horse's hoofs.

The driver could no longer control the horse. The man on the ground could not move away at all and curled up like a ball.

The horse was going to trample on the poor man any moment now, but Mingyue Xin had not made any move to help him. In fact, she shown no such intentions at all and wasn't even looking in his direction.

She was looking at Fu Hongxue. Fu Hongxue was also out of the compartment. His pale face shown no expression at all, much less any intention to help.

The crowd cried in alarm as the horse brought down its hoofs. Everyone could clearly see that the green gown man was directly beneath the horse hoofs, but yet he managed to avoid being trampled. When the horse finally calmed down, that man then slowly climbed up to his feet and panted furiously.

Although his face was very pale from fear and shock, he still looked very ordinary. He was indeed an ordinary man, not a thing special about him.

But when Fu Hongxue saw him, his eyes turned frosty.

He had seen this person. He was the person whose trouser leg was soiled by the Thumb a while ago.

Mingyue Xin smiled suddenly, "Looked like you are down on your luck today, your pants was soiled with mouthwash just a while ago and now your whole body was covered with dirt."

This person also smiled and softly said, "Today my luck isn't good, but who knows how many people have worse luck than me. Today I am unlucky, tomorrow who knows how many people will be even more unlucky. Life is like that, mistress doesn't have to be so worried."

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## Chapter 5 – Peacock

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The horse didn't hurt anyone, and the carriage didn't turn over flat.

This ordinary, unremarkable person had melted into the sea of people in a blink of the eye, the same way a small bubble disappeared in the vast ocean. Things like these were hardly noticeably at all.

Fu Hongxue slowly raised his head. Mingyue Xin saw that he was smiling, smiling in an odd way but yet very sweetly.

Out of the blue, he seemed to be lashed by an invisible whip and he instantly turned around and stepped back into the compartment.

Within that moment, Mingyue Xin had seen not only the dread and pain on his face but could also felt the unbearable sorrow buried deep in his heart.

Memories that had flowed away like running water and persons that had been blown away by the wind. Why had they resurfaced in his eyes?

She couldn't stop herself and lightly touched her own face. That clay Buddha mask was jerked down when she shot out of the compartment, she let him see her face again.

She suddenly despised herself a little, hated herself for resembling that woman.

However, she hated that woman even more for causing others such deep pain.

Why must humans hurt each other? The deeper the love, the greater the hurt.

Her fingertip lightly caressed her eye, only then she realised that her eyes were already moist.

Who is she crying for?

Is it for ignorance of Man? Or for this lonely stranger?

She quietly dried her eyes and stepped back into the compartment, her face was once again covered by the always smiling Buddha mask. In her heart she only wished that she could be the same as this stout and carefree Bodhisattva and forget all the pain and sufferings in the world. Even if it was just for a single moment.

However, men are not gods. Even the Bodhisattvas no doubt have their own moments of pain. Their smile is perhaps only to deliberately hide that pain for the benefit of Man.

She comforted her heart with this.

Fu Hongxue's pale face was still twitching in convulsion. She barely suppressed the sharp pain in heart, "You certainly recognise the person just now."

He certainly recognised.

Mingyue Xin added, "But you never take any notice of him because he is genuinely too ordinary."

As ordinary as a bubble in the ocean, a seed in the grain bin. Nobody would give him a second look.

Only when you were drowning with seawater in your mouth, would you discover that the bubble had turned a black finger stabbing in through the mouth into your heart.

Mingyue Xin exhaled, "That is why I always considered this kind of people as the most fearsome of all. If he had not shown himself, you might never notice him."

Fu Hongxue acknowledged.

But why did he deliberately blow his own cover just now?

Mingyue Xin explained. "He did so to check us out."

Thumb must have noticed someone spying from the carriage across the street so he purposely spat on his trouser leg. While pretending to clean up, he must have secretly informed him.

He then deliberately threw himself in front of the horse. For he knew, only by doing so, he could lure out the persons from inside the compartment.

Mingyue Xin lamented, "We had not yet checked them out but they had already known all about us. Within two hours, they would know where Yan Nanfei is."

Fu Hongxue immediately asked, "Blackhand had a grudge with Yan Nanfei?"

Mingyue Xin replied, "No, they never kill for reasons such as personal grudges."

Fu Hongxue, "Then they kill for what sort of reasons?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Only orders."

On orders, they would kill, no matter whom.

Fu Hongxue said, "Where do they take orders from?"

Mingyue Xin said, "They only take orders from one man."

Fu Hongxue, "Who?"

Mingyue Xin, "Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue tightened his grip.

Mingyue Xin, "By themselves, the five Fingers of Blackhand certainly would not have the power to establish such an organisation."

Their organisation had gained control of almost all the top killers and assassins. Double Killers of Five Elements and Ghostly Granny were no doubt also members of this organisation.

Figures such as them would demand a high price for any single operation, to totally control them was thus not a simple task.

Mingyue Xin continued, "In the whole wide world, only one person alone have that sort of power"

Fu Hongxue guessed, "Gongzi Yu?"

Mingyue Xin stated, "Only him alone!"

Fu Hongxue stared at the hand on his sabre, the orbs of his eyes contracting.

Mingyue Xin was also silent for a long while before softly, "Stop killing with killing, you should have killed that man just now."

Fu Hongxue laughed coldly.

Mingyue Xin said, "I know that you never draw your sabre easily, but he is already worthy of it."

Fu Hongxue mused, "You suppose he is the Nameless Finger himself?"

Mingyue Xin slowly nodded, "I even suspect him to be the Peacock."

Fu Hongxue, "Peacock?"

Mingyue Xin, "Peacock is a kind of bird, a beautiful bird especially its plume..."

Fu Hongxue quipped, "But the Peacock you are referring is not a bird."

Mingyue Xin admitted, "I was referring not to a bird but a person. A very fearsome person."

The orbs of her eyes also contracted and slowly she continued, "I even feel that he is the most fearsome person under the heavens."

Fu Hongxue said, "Why is it?"

"Because he has the Peacock Plume!" Mingyue Xin exclaimed.

Peacock Plume!

When she said these words, her eyes momentarily shone with awe and fear.

Even Fu Hongxue's face changed.

The plume of a peacock is just like the antlers of the antelope, not only precious but beautiful as well.

But the peacock plume they were referring to was not the tail feathers of a peacock but a hidden projectile!

A mystical, yet beautiful hidden projectile.

A fearsome hidden projectile.

Nobody could describe its beauty, nobody could also evade it, withstand it!

In that moment of its release, the mystical splendid and beauty was not only completely dizzying but also capable of momentarily banishing the fear of death! It was said that all the victims of this hidden projectile died with a mysterious and peculiar smile.

So, there were many people who were happy to die under this hidden projectile in same way as those who knew perfectly well that the wild rose has thorns, and yet still reached out to pluck it.

Because this kind of splendid beauty wasn't something that mere mortals could refuse!

"You, of course know about the Peacock Plume!"

"I know."

"But what you certainly don't know is: Peacock Plume is no longer in the Peacock Manor."

Fu Hongxue had always been a man who wasn't easily flustered, but on hearing this, he was totally flabbergasted.

He not only knew about Peacock Plume, but had also visited Peacock Manor.

At that time, he felt like a pilgrim upon reaching the holy land.

It was then early autumn, autumn night.

He had never before seen such an extraordinary beautiful and stately place. The night scenery of Peacock Manor was near that of the mystical Imperial Palace.

“There were altogether nine large estates. The majority were built 330 years ago and experienced generations of change before achieving their present grandeur and scale.”

His host was the younger brother of the Master of Peacock Manor, Qiu Shuiqing.

Qiu Shuiqing was a man that was very conservative in speech.

The truth was this place was more than plain grandeur, it was simply miraculous.

“This was indeed miraculous. After being invaded countless times by war and plunder, the place still retained its tranquil peace.”

At the rear court, just in front of the gate, on the decorative wall facing the hall, thirteen coloured lanterns stood hanging.

Their magnificent light illuminated the huge painting on that wall. –

There were around a dozen of ferociously savage ruffians, each armed with a different kind of weapon. But their eyes were all cowering with awe and fear. All in fear of a golden sphere, in the hands of a pale scholar. A golden sphere radiating with rainbow-like rays. The radiance more gloriously beautiful than any rainbow.

“That was an event long passed. At that time, the 36 Death Stars of the underworld allied together and jointly attacked in order to destroy this place. With the combined strength of all 36, it was said that they were all but invincible.”

But not one of the 36 returned with their lives.

“From that day on, nobody in the martial world would dare to lightly violate the peace of Peacock Manor and the name, Peacock Plume spread all across the world!”

Even till this moment, Qiu Shuiqing’s words at that time were still ringing in his ears.

Never in his dreams, would he believe that Peacock Plume was now no longer in Peacock Manor.

“The secret ...” Mingyue Xin declared. “The secret was something that no one in the martial world had known.

The head of the 13th generation of Qiu family had lost the Peacock Plume at the summit of Mount Tai!

“This secret was now only starting to be known because the Peacock Plume had suddenly reappeared in the martial world.”

Only appeared twice, only claimed two victims!

Both victims were certainly well known and highly skilled, the killer was however not from Peacock Manor.

“As long as the Peacock Plume existed, nobody in the martial world dared to violate Peacock Manor. Otherwise it faced destruction.”

“Peacock Manor’s 300 years of reputation, eighty li of property, and 500 human lives were all in fact built on the tiny Peacock Plume!”

But the Peacock Plume was now in the hands of a completely unknown stranger!

Fu Hongxue couldn’t hold it, “And that person is Peacock?”

“Yes!”

## **TWO**

The antelope was hunted and killed only because of its antlers. Graves were uncovered and robbed only because of its buried treasure.

More often than not, calamities avoided the clumsy and weak and ugly maidens kept their chastity.

Peacock understood this very well.

Only the most ordinary, the most anonymous could securely possess a weapon like Peacock Plume!

Actually he wasn't such a person in the beginning; he was like most people who dreamed of wealth and fame.

Since that stuffy hot summer night, when he saw the girl of his dreams pressed down on the grass with a rich dandy, humping and grasping, he resolved to obtain undreamt of wealth and fame.

He had obtained something that was far more precious than he ever dreamt of – He had obtained the Peacock Plume!

Thus his resolve changed as well. For he was an intelligent person, he didn't want to be hunted and killed like the antelope!

He wanted to kill!

Every time he remembered that stuffy hot summer night, every time he remembered that girl humping and grasping in sweat, he only wanted to kill.

But today he didn't kill!

Not that he didn't want to, but because he didn't dare to!

Faced with that pale white face and callous icy stare, he instantly felt a little fear in his heart.

Since he obtained the Peacock Plume, this was the first time that he was fearful of a person.

His fear was not of the pitch black sabre, but the man holding the sabre. Although he just stood there quietly, he was by far sharper than a sabre out of its sheath.



That callous icy stare made his heart skip. His heart was still beating crazily when he reached his own house.

The fast beating of his heart was however not entirely out of fear and dread.

He was excited!

Because he really wanted to test it out, wanted to test if the Peacock Plume could kill this person.

But sadly he lacked exactly that kind of courage!

A very simple house, only with a bed, a chest and a table, a chair.

He collapsed the moment he made it past the door, collapsed onto the bed, the cold and hard bed board did nothing to calm him down. Abruptly, he discovered inside the pants his thing had already risen up from the root.

He was really too excited, because he wanted to kill again, because he again remembered that stuffy summer night...

The lust of killing actually would ignite his impulses and desires; this was something that he himself could not comprehend.

Most unbearably was that once aroused, this kind of impulse was all but impossible to suppress.

He had no women.

He had trusted no women, never allowed women to touch him. He resolved this kind of need with the only method he knows: Killing.

Unfortunately, now he lacked the courage to kill the person he wanted to kill.

That spring afternoon, suddenly turned as stuffy as the summer night.

He slowly reached out with his sweaty hands. At this moment, he could only ease his impulse with his hands. After that, he lay prostrated on the bed, vomiting without a pause.

Vomiting while in tears!

Dusk, nearing dusk but yet dusk.

A person pushed open the door silently, entering silently. His body was potty and clumsy, and yet his movements were quick and light as a wild cat.

Peacock was still lying motionlessly on the bed; he looked coldly at this person. He had always disliked this silly fatty, but now in his heart, there was an indescribable loathing.

This person was only a eunuch, a worthless being, a pig!

However, this pig was unfortunately immune to the stirring of lust and thus would never be tormented by such numbing ache.

Looking at the fat smiling face, he almost could not stop himself from giving him a good punch on the nose.

But he could only endure it.

Because he was his comrade as well as his thumb.

Thumb was still smiling away and silently sat down on the chair beside the bed. With a smile, "I know you certainly would have a way to lure them out, you never fail in your task."

Peacock calmly remarked, "You see them, right?"

Thumb nodded, "The woman is Mingyue Xin. The man is Fu Hongxue."

Fu Hongxue!

Peacock tightened his grip again.

He had heard of that name, also recognised this person and further acknowledged this person's sabre!

The matchless fast sabre under the heavens!

Thumb said, "Yan Nanfei is still alive sorely because of Fu Hongxue, so..."

Peacock instantly jumped up, "In order to kill Yan Nanfei, Fu Hongxue must be first eliminated!"

His face was already flushed with excitement, even his eyes had too turned red.

Thumb looked at him in surprise, for none had ever seen him to be so excited and animated.

The Calm Peacock, The Ordinary Peacock, The Nameless Peacock, The Killer Peacock.

Thumb baited, "You want to kill Fu Hongxue that much?"

Peacock smiled and lightly said, "I have always like to kill humans, and Fu Hongxue is also one."

Thumb said, "But he is not an ordinary human, it is not an easy thing to kill him."

Peacock said, "I know that, that is why I, myself don't want to act"

Thumb said, "If you don't act, who else dare to."

Peacock smiled again, "I don't act, because I am not a famous person and also don't wish to be famous."

Thumb also smiled, with the twinkle in his eyes, "You are thinking of getting Du Lei to risk his life first and then take the winnings later."

Peacock nonchalantly said, "In any case, whoever win or lose, I would not be discomforted."

Mingyue Xin was much discomforted, discomforted like a snail that had hidden in its shell for a long time without sunning itself.

The mask on her face was bought at last year's temple fair. Although the workmanship is superb, wearing it for long periods would still cause some itchiness on her face.

Once the face itched, the rest of the body would not be too comfortable.

However, she didn't want to remove this mask. Presently, she was also somewhat frightful of allowing Fu Hongxue to see her face.

This subtle feeling was something that she could not comprehend nor did she wish to comprehend.

They came in when the setting sun was shining directly at the wild roses outside the window. The colour of the wild roses was even more striking after the rain.

Yan Nanfei's face was however as white as a sheet of paper.

"Has Young Master Yan regain consciousness?"

"No," The one who had been at Yan Nanfei's bedside all the while was that same Young Girl with large eyes.

"Have you feed him the medicine?"

"No too," Young Girl pursed her lips, hid her smile, "Without any instructions from Miss, I wouldn't even dare to touch him."

"Why?"

"Because..." Young Girl could no longer stop herself from laughing out loud. "Because I am afraid that Miss might be jealous!"

Mingyue Xin gave her a fierce stare, turned around to Fu Hongxue, "Is it time for him to take his medicine now?"

Fu Hongxue faced the window, slowly nodded.

The rays of setting sun filled up the whole window.

The window frame was as new as the newly glued window paper, shiny as a mirror.

The two window panels were set at an angle. The lower panel was reflected with a field of wild roses, the upper panel reflected that of the room.

Mingyue Xin was now standing at the head of the bed. She took a pill from the vial of antidote and dissolved it in warm water.

Her every movement was slow and careful as though fearing that spoonful of medicine's effectiveness would weaken if she spilt a little.

But she did not feed Yan Nanfei with that spoonful of medicine!

Fu Hongxue's back was still facing them. She gave him a fugitive glance and quickly dumped that spoonful of medicine into Young Girl's sleeve. Then she helped Yan Nanfei up and put the empty spoon into his mouth.

What's the meaning of this?

Her purpose of getting Fu Hongxue here was to save Yan Nanfei. But an empty spoon wasn't going to save anyone.

Fu Hongxue was still standing there silently.

Although he didn't turn his head, window panel was as reflective as the shiny mirror. He could very clearly see her each and every move.

But he didn't show the slightest reaction.

Mingyue Xin fugitively glanced at him again, and then slowly lay Yan Nanfei down. Muttering, "After this dose of medicine, with a good sleep, I think he would wake up tomorrow morning."

Of course, in her heart she knew that he certainly would not wake up.

She was sighing. However in that pair of eyes, clear as the moon betrayed a hint of cunning.

At this moment, someone from outside suddenly said, "A letter for Hero Fu."

The envelope and the letter paper was both the most expensive kind available in the market!

The letter was very brief, the characters were very tidy. "Tomorrow noon. In the abandoned Ni Family Garden, outside the hexagonal pavilion, bring your sabre! One man, one sabre!"

Fu Hongxue had almost no need to read the signature at the bottom, for this letter was most certainly from Du Lei.

He could see that although Du Lei was very orderly, he was also extravagantly showy.

His assessment was not wrong.

Mingyue Xin breathed out deeply, "I know that Du Lei would certainly challenge you, but never thought that it would come so soon!"

Fu Hongxue folded the letter carefully using the hand not holding the sabre and then asked, "Where is the abandoned Ni Family Garden?"

Mingyue Xin, "Just right opposite here."

Fu Hongxue said, "Very good."

Mingyue Xin puzzled, "Very good?"

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "I am a cripple, I don't like to walk too far before a duel!"

Mingyue Xin said, "You intend to go?"

Fu Hongxue confirmed, "Certainly."

Mingyue Xin, "Going alone?"

Fu Hongxue, "One man, one sabre!"

Mingyue Xin suddenly laughed coldly, "Good, very good!"

This was a puzzling statement, and a puzzling smirk. Fu Hongxue did not understand, but he did not ask.

Mingyue Xin, "Tonight, you could have a good sleep. Tomorrow after breakfast, you would reach the abandoned Ni Garden in just a few steps, certainly enough time for you check out the surroundings."

When top experts duelled, the advantage of familiar ground was one of the decisive factors between victory and defeat.

Mingyue Xin said, "You had also observed Du Lei very well, knowing his character and habits while he didn't know a thing about you."

Knowing oneself and one's opponent was of course even more decisive than knowing the ground.

Mingyue Xin said, "So, you already have all the decisive advantages in this duel. The moment you draw your sabre, there will be only 12 names left on the [Hall of Fame]. Even if you don't really like to kill, it is still a very joyous situation!"

Again she laughed out very coldly and shouted, "What about Yan Nanfei? Have you given him a thought?"

Fu Hongxue said plainly, "The one with a death duel is not him."

Mingyue Xin, "The one going to die is however certainly to be him!"

Fu Hongxue, "Certainly?"

Mingyue Xin, "Peacock and Thumb would have no doubt know his whereabouts by now, as soon as you stepped into the abandoned Ni garden, they would storm into this house."

Fu Hongxue's grip tightened again, the roots of green veins stood out like a pattern on the back of his pale white hands.

Mingyue Xin coldly stared at him and just as coldly mused, "Perhaps you had saved his life in the past, but he would have live longer if not for you."

The green veins at the back of Fu Hongxue's hand stood out even more distinctly, and suddenly he asked a question that he knew he shouldn't ask.

"Do you really care for him?"

Mingyue Xin, "Certainly."

She replied without thinking, replied immediately and replied very calmly.

She seemed to bear no resemblance at all with the person who had just dumped a spoon of life saving antidote into the sleeve of the Young Girl.

Fu Hongxue didn't check out the expression on her face. Even if he had looked, he could not see.

On her face, she was still wearing that ever smiling mask.

What kind of woman was hidden beneath this mask?

After another long while, Fu Hongxue softly said, "Unless I shouldn't go?"

Mingyue Xin answered, "You certainly should go."

Fu Hongxue said, "But..."

Mingyue Xin interrupted him, "But before you go, you should send him to a safe place."

Fu Hongxue said, "Which is a safe place?"

Mingyue Xin chipped in, "Peacock Manor!"

A hidden weapon that no beings under the heavens could evade.

The radiance more gloriously beautiful than any rainbow.

Fu Hongxue exhaled, "You had said that Peacock Plume is no longer in Peacock Manor."

Mingyue Xin acknowledged, "That's right"

Fu Hongxue, "Then, is Peacock Manor still standing?"

Mingyue Xin, "There is still Qiu Shuiqing."

A big tall silent man.

A prominent name.



Mingyue Xin declared, "Although he is always very conservative, but he would not refuse the people you sent!"

Fu Hongxue, "Oh?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Because he owed you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Owed what?"

Mingyue Xin supplied, "Owed you a life."

She did not give Fu Hongxue a chance to deny it and continued, "All the while, it is true that you seldom save people's lives but you had saved him before. In fact, you had saved him twice. Once on the bank of River Wei, another at the foot of Mount Tai.

Fu Hongxue could not deny it, because she really knew too much.

Mingyue Xin added, "Presently, he is already the Master of Peacock Manor, and he now has enough strength to pay this debt."

Fu Hongxue said, "But he no longer has the Peacock Plume."

If the Peacock Plume is missing, Peacock Manor would face immediate destruction.

Mingyue Xin explained, "Everyone had long believed that the reputation of Peacock Manor is all built upon the Peacock Plume. It is only now that they realised that Qiu Shuiqing, this person is far more fearsome than the Peacock Plume."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Why?"

Mingyue Xin said, "News that the Peacock Plume had fallen into the hands of someone outside the family spread very fast in the martial world. The Peacock Manor had many enemies, in the last two years there were at least six expeditions to sack Peacock Manor."

Very slowly she continued, "These six expeditions had altogether 79 people, each of them highly skilled."

Fu Hongxue, "The outcome?"

Mingxue Xin, "Once these 79 experts stepped into Peacock Manor, they disappeared like a pebble sunk into the vast ocean. No further news was ever heard of them again."

Mingyue Xin, "The last expedition set off at last year Double Ninth Festival. Since then, no one in the martial world dare to violate Peacock Manor."

Fu Hongxue had shut his mouth.

Mingyue Xin glanced at him with the corner of her eye, "Peacock Manor isn't far away. If we travel lightly with a fast carriage, we would certainly reach there before tomorrow noon."

But Fu Hongxue did not comply, neither did he refuse. After another long pause he suddenly said, "Don't you fear that they would block our path?"

Mingyue Xin said, "In the martial world, who could block your path?"

Fu Hongxue said, "At least one."

Mingyue Xin asked, "Who?"

Fu Hongxue replied, "Peacock with the Peacock Plume."

Mingyue Xin assured, "He certainly wouldn't dare to."

Fu Hongxue, "Why?"

Mingyue Xin, "Although the Peacock Plume is the matchless hidden weapon under the heavens, Peacock himself was however not an unrivaled master. He was afraid that your sabre might be faster than his hand."

No matter how fearsome the hidden weapon, it is as good as scrap metal if it couldn't be released.

Fu Hongxue again fell into silence.

Mingyue Xin said, "If you really don't wish that he died in the hands of others, you should bring us there now."

Fu Hongxue finally made up his mind, "I can bring both of you there, but I have something to ask you."

Mingyue Xin, "Go ahead."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "If you really care about him, why did you pour his antidote on a sleeve?"

With it, he turned and walked out without looking back, as though he knew that Mingyue Xin had no way to answer that question.

Mingyue Xin was indeed speechlessly shocked.

She indeed could not answer, neither was she willing to.

She only could look on helplessly as Fu Hongxue made his way out. Although he walked slowly, but he never stop.

Once he started to walk, he certainly would not stop.

The setting sun had gradually turned pale, pale as the moon.

The pale rays of setting sun, shined directly on Yan Nanfei's face.

The wind blowing from the mountains afar carried the light fragrance of the forest. From the spot Mingyue Xin stood, one could see the green of the mountains afar.

But she was however looking at Yan Nanfei.

The deeply poisoned and long unconscious Yan Nanfei, unexpectedly also opened his eyes and looked at her.

She was unexpectedly again not surprised at all.

Yan Nanfei smiled abruptly, "I had said, I had said long ago, to deceive him is not easy at all."

Mingyue Xin said, "I also know that it is not easy, but I must give it a try."

Yan Nanfei said, "Now, have you tried?"

Mingyue Xin said, "I had tried."

Yan Nanfei said, "What do you think?"

Mingyue Xin sighed gently, with a bitter smile, "I only feel that to deceive him is indeed not easy."

Yan Nanfei said, "But I must give it another try!"

Mingyue Xin's eyes has shone, Yan Nanfei's eyes was also shinning brightly.

Why did they want to deceive Fu Hongxue?

What was their goal?

The setting sun in the western sky.

Fu Hongxue under the setting sun.

Under the setting sun there was only him, in the entire world there was only him.

He was completely alone.

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## Chapter 6 – Before the Duel

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*Fu Hongxue*

*About 36-37 years old.*

*Characterised by his maimed right foot and the sabre that never left his hand.*

*His martial arts don't seem to be from a particular school or teacher. His self learned sabre is extremely quick and widely acknowledged as the martial world's number one sabre.*

*His family background is unclear. He was said to be adopted from birth by the Devil Sect's Princess Bai Feng, and thus well he is acquainted in all kinds of killing arts using poison. He had never married, and roamed the world without a home.*

*His character is eccentric and callous, operating alone and associating with no one else.*

Du Lei slowly pushed the paper with these data to the Thumb without any expressions.

Thumb asked, "Have you read these?"

Du Lei, "Hmm.."

Thumb sighed, "I know that you would not be satisfied, but that's all the data we could dig out. And that's as much as anyone know about Fu Hongxue."

Du Lei, "Very good."

Thumb blinked and lightly probed, "Are these of any help to you?"

Du Lei, "Not at all"

Thumb, "Not even one bit?"

Du Lei slowly nodded. He stood up, opened up a step and quickly sat down again. He said coldly, "Your data left out two things, the two most important points."

Thumb, "Oh.."

Du Lei, "He was cheated by a woman before, very badly cheated."

Thumb, "Who was this woman?"

Du Lei, "A whore called, Cui Nong"

Thumb sighed again, "I had always wondered why intelligent men are so easily cheated by whores."

Peacock suddenly butted in and sneered, "That's because intelligent men would only like intelligent women and clever women are mostly whores."

Thumb shook his head and laughed, "I knew you hate women but would never guess that you hated them that much."

Du Lei sneered, "Looks like he was also cheated by a woman."

Peacock's face changed colour, unexpectedly smiled and changed the topic, "What's the second point?"

Du Lei, "He has a sickness"

Thumb, "What sickness?"

Du Lei, "Epilepsy."

Thumb's eyes shone, "When his sickness acts up, he would foam in the mouth and roll on the ground?"

Du Lei, "Epilepsy has only one kind of effect."

Thumb wondered, "How could an insane cripple like him mastered the unparalleled sabre under the heavens."

Du Lei, "He has worked hard. It was said that he practiced his sabre at least eight hours everyday, starting from the age four to five, drawing his sabre at least 12000 times a day."

Thumb laughed bitterly, "I can't believe that you know more about him than us."

Du Lei softly said, "I know that much about each and every person in the Hall of Fame, because I had spent five whole months collecting their info and another five months researching their skills."

Thumb, "I am sure you had spent more time on Fu Hongxue than anyone else."

Du Lei acknowledged that.

Thumb, "So what's the result of your research?"

Du Lei, "His sabre had never left his hands, for at least the last twenty years that sabre is all he ever used. By now, that sabre had practically become part of his body. He used that sabre, better and more easily than others used their own finger."

Thumb, "From what I know, that sabre isn't really a good quality sabre."

Du Lei, "A sabre that can kill is a good sabre!"

For Fu Hongxue, that sabre is no longer just a sabre. The man and sabre had developed a link that others would not be able understand. Although Du Lei did not say that aloud, but Thumb had understood what he had meant.

Peacock was pondering all this time, and suddenly said, "If we can take away his sabre..."

Du Lei, "Nobody can take away his sabre."

Peacock smiled, "There are always exceptions to every matter."

Du Lei, "There will be no exceptions in this case."

Peacock did not argue further but instead asked, "Usually, when would his sickness act up?"

Du Lei, "His sickness surfaces when he is suffering from extreme anger or sorrow."

Peacock, "If you can strike when he is sick..."

Du Lei's face darkened and coldly said, "What kind of person do you think I am?"

Peacock smiled again, "I also know you are not willing to do such things, but we could easily have others to do that. If we could get someone to anger him first, then..."

Du lei suddenly shot up, and coldly declared, "I only hope you understand one thing."

Peacock is listening, and so is the Thumb!

Du Lei, "This duel is between he and I alone, no matter who wins or loses, it has nothing do with anyone else."

Thumb suddenly injected, "Nothing to do with Gongzi as well?"

Du Lei's hand on the scabbard tightened suddenly.

Thumb, "If you haven't have forgotten Gongzi, then you should at least do one thing."

Du Lei could not help but to ask, "What is that?"

Thumb, "Let him wait, let him wait longer, till he is anxious and bothered before you go."

He smiled and continued, "This battle you win or lose, live or die, we don't really care. But we are also not keen to collect your body."

....

Noon, the abandoned Ni Family Garden.



The sun's rays are shining on the hexagonal pavilion. Outside the pavilion, there is one man, one sabre!

A pitch black sabre!

Fu Hongxue slowly walked across the weeds-invaded alley, his hand clenching the sabre tightly.

Although the red paint on the railings were already peeling off, the pavilion was still standing proud in the mist of the greenery . Under the sun's rays, it looked every bit of its former glory.

This place certainly used to be splendid, but why had it fallen to such a desolate state?

A pair of swallows flew in and settled on the poplar tree outside the hexagonal pavilion, as though they were searching too for its former glory.

It's a pity that while the poplar tree was still the same, the local scenery was all gone.

The swallows had flew back and fro, how many times had they came and how many times had they left?

The poplar never asked.

The poplar had no words!

The poplar had no feelings.

Fu Hongxue suddenly felt a stinging pain in his heart.

He had long mastered the polar's silence, but when could he ever mastered the polar's ruthlessness!

Fu Hongxue stood there foolishly, as if forgetting where he was and where he's from.

He did not think further, because he suddenly heard somebody's laughter.

Laughter, clear and sweet like a golden oriole.

The sun had set and the grass had grown tall but there was no sign of the oriole.

The sounds of the golden oriole was in the tall grass.

From the tall grass, a girl suddenly stood up, looking at Fu Hongxue and laughing in a silly way.

Her laughter was beautiful, but more so was her person, her long raven hair as soft as silk.

She didn't comb her hair and let her silky soft black hair fell free on her shoulders.

She didn't wear any make-up either, just a long gown that fitted easily on her. It is neither silk or satin, but it lusted like her hair.

Fu Hongxue did not ask.

"I was laughing at you." She laughed even more sweetly. "You stood there, looking like a fool."

Fu Hongxue was silent.

"You wouldn't even ask who I am?"

"Who are you?"

Fu Hongxue had asked, as he had originally intended to!

Who could have known that the moment he opened his mouth, that long-haired girl leaped up with a yell.

"I was waiting for you to ask just that." She leaped up with the ominousness of a provoked kitten. "Do you know who owns the land you are standing on? Who are you to swagger around like a lord?"

Fu Hongxue coolly watched her and waited for her to continued.

"This place belongs to the Ni family." Her finger pointing at her own nose, "I am 2nd Miss Ni, "I could chase you out any time I pleased."

Fu Hongxue could only keep his mouth shut.

One hadn't much to say when one was caught trespassing by the owner herself.

2nd Miss Ni stared at him maliciously with her pair of large eyes. She smile again, still as sweetly as before.

"However, I certainly would not chase you out, because..." She winked, "Because I like you."

Fu Hongxue could only listen.

You can choose not to fancy someone, but you can't prevent others from fancying you.

But just as suddenly, this 2nd Miss Ni changed her mind, "I was actually lying when I said I like you." Sighing, "I didn't chased you out, because I know I am not your match."

Fu Hongxue could not help but to ask, "So, you know me?"

"Of course!"

"What do you know?"

"I not only know about your martial arts, but your surname and name as well."

With her hands behind her back, she swaggered out of the long grass. Slanting her eyes, she sized up Fu Hongxue from top to bottom.

"Others all said that you are a freak, but I don't find you strange in any way. In fact, you are rather good looking."

Fu Hongxue slowly turned and walked towards the hexagonal pavilion, "You are the only one left in this place?"

"So what if I am alone?" She rolled her eyeballs, "Don't tell me you still dare to bully me?"

“Usually, you don’t stay here?”

“Why would I stay in such an ghastly place by myself?”

Fu Hongxue suddenly turned and stared at her, “Why are you still here now?”

2nd Miss Ni exclaimed, “This is my home, I can come and go as I like. Why should I be under the orders of others?”

Fu Hongxue could only shut up yet again.

2nd Miss Ni stared at him intensely in a fierce looking manner. She then smiled again, “Actually, I shouldn’t have quarreled with you. If we start fighting now, how could we manage in the future?”

Future?

Do you know that there are some people without a future?

Fu Hongxue slowly stepped on to the stone dike and stared into an unseen distant location. Despite the sun’s rays, his face is still frightfully pale.

He only wished that Du Lei would be here soon.

She however still latched on to him, “I know you are Fu Hongxue, so you should at least ask for my name.”

He did not ask, so she could only continued herself, “My name is Ni Hui, meaning ‘wise’.” Without warning, she leaped up the railings, facing Fu Hongxue, “My father give me this name, because I have been intelligent since childhood.”

Fu Hongxue ignored her.

“You don’t believe me?” With her hands on her waist, her forehead nearly touching his nose, she said, “I not only know why you are here but also what type of people you are waiting for.”

“Hmm..”

“You are certainly here for a life and death duel, I can tell from one look.”

“Hmm..”

“You have a murderous aura.”

What did this small slip of a girl know about murderous auras?

“I also know that the person you are waiting for is certainly Du Lei”, Ni Hui said confidently. “Because within a few hundred li of this area, the only one who can match up with Fu Hongxue is Du Lei.”

This girl indeed knew quite a bit.

Fu Hongxue looked her two lively eyes and coldly said, “ Since you know, you should leave quickly.”

Although his voice was cold, the emotion in his eyes wasn’t quite as cold. In fact, the outline of his eyes showed some hint of tenderness.

Ni Hui smiled again, gently, “Are you starting to care for me?”

Fu Hongxue immediately lowered his face. “The reason I want you to go is that I don’t kill for others to watch.”

Ni Hui curled her lips, “Even if you want me gone, there is no real hurry. Du Lei wouldn’t be here that soon.”

Fu Hongxue lifted his head, the sun was already in the middle of the sky.

Ni Hui, “He would let you wait, let you till wait you are agitated. When you are agitated, his chances would increased.”

She smiled and continued, “This is also a kind of battle strategy, a man like you should had thought of it a long time ago.”

She shook her head, “No no, you wouldn’t have thought of it, you are a gentleman. I am, however not one, so I can teach you a method that is used especially to deal with such villain.”

What method?

Fu Hongxue did not ask but did not refuse either.

Ni Hui, "He let you wait, you could also let him wait."

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

This is an ancient method, an ancient method is usually a very effective method.

Ni Hui, "We could take a walk before coming back. We could even play two games of chess, drink two cups of wine. Let him wait for you here, let him wait till he is anxious."

Fu Hongxue showed no reaction.

Ni Hui, "I could bring you to my family wine cellar. If we are lucky, we might even find a couple jars of maiden's blush wine that was left when my aunt got married.

She was in high spirits. But he still did not show any reaction, so she reached out for his hand – the hand that held the sabre.

Nobody can touch that hand.

Her soft delicate fingers merely brushed his hand, but she could feel a strange and powerful vibration.

This powerful vibration actually sent her whole body flying away.

She was trying to remain standing but she couldn't steady herself and finally she fell down, a heavy fall!

Although she didn't cry, her eyes were already flushing red. With a choking voice, "I only wanted to make friends with you and help you with such a small matter. Why did you treat me like this?"

She rubbed her nose and looked to cry any moment.

She looked just like a small, tiny girl, so pitiful and cute.

Fu Hongxue did not pay her any attention, did not look at her, not even one look. He however coolly said, "Get up, there are snakes in the grass."

Ni Hui felt even more wronged. "How could I stand up when all bones in my body were nearly broken just now?"

She used the hand that was rubbing her nose to rub her eyes, "I might as well be bitten to death by the venomous snake."

Fu Hongxue's pale face still had no emotion, but he already started to walk to her.

He knew how much power he had used just now.

That strength did not come wholly from his hand. His hand was holding the sabre and the sabre too had its own strength.

In his hands, the sabre seemed to have a life of its own.

With life, it has strength.

The power of life.

This kind of strength is powerful, almost as powerful as that kind of sword-qi that can cut through everything.

He indeed shouldn't have used this sort of strength on her.

Ni Hui sat dejectedly upon the grass, with her face buried in her hands.

Her hands are white and small.

Fu Hongxue couldn't help but to reach out and pull her up – naturally with the hand which is not holding his sabre.

She did not refuse or avoid him.

Her hand was soft and warm.

Fu Hongxue had not touch a girl's hand for a long, long time.

His control over his own lust is almost thorough and complete.

However, he is still a man. One who wasn't too old, yet.

She obediently stood up, softly groaning. He was just about to support her, but her whole body unexpectedly fell into his embrace.

Her body was so warm, so soft.

He could feel his own heartbeat, and she of course could feel it too.

Oddly, at the same time he suddenly had another very unnatural sensation.

He suddenly felt a rush of a murderous aura.

At this very moment, she had pulled out a dagger. A seven inch dagger. The dagger stabbed at the weak point on the his armpit.

Her face was still that of a small, tiny girl, but her hands were as deadly as the venomous cobra.

Sadly, her stab still missed the mark.

Fu Hongxue's body suddenly contracted, and the blade that was clearly aimed for his flesh and blood merely grazed his skin.

In the same moment when she realised that she had missed, she had already sprung up!

Just like the kind of venomous snake which could suddenly sprung up from the ground, the second she sprung up, she somersaulted away.

One somersault after another in mid-air resulting in her feet being on the eaves of the hexagonal pavilion.

With her feet firmly planted, she sent herself flying 50 feet away into the trees with another flip.

She had intended to flee further but Fu Hongxue didn't give chase. So, she didn't have to flee either. Amazingly, with just one foot on a thin tree branch, she could hurl abuse.



Her lightness skill was high, but her ability to hurl abuse was higher.

“Now I know why that woman in the past jilted you. It is because you are simply not a man. You are not only crippled in the leg, but crippled in the heart as well.”

Her curses were not very vulgar, but every word was like a needle, piercing Fu Hongxue’s heart.

Fu Hongxue’s pale face suddenly had a kind of red blush, his hand was already holding tight.

He almost couldn’t help but to draw his sabre.

However, he didn’t move because he realised the pain in his heart wasn’t as intense as he had thought.

In the past, his pain was like a hot brand on livestock, forever clear and fresh.

Her every smile, her every tear, every bit of emotion, every little lie was deeply etched in his heart.

He had always hidden it very well.

All until the moment he saw Mingyue Xin – all the deeply hidden painful memories, all came alive in front of him.

No one could have imagined the pain he had borne then.

But unexpectedly to him, after that shocking hurt, his pain lessened. The unthinkable pain had become more bearable.

The hurt of the heart is sometimes like a festering wound. If you do not cut it out, it would rot even more; if you steeled your heart and cut it out, allowing the blood and pus to flow out, the wound might begin to heal.

When Fu Hongxue lifted his head again, he had completely recovered his composure.

Ni Hui was still on the tree branch, staring at him in surprise. He didn't draw his sabre, but he softly said two words, "You. Leave!"

This time Ni Hui obeyed. She left very quickly.

...

The sun had already moved to the west, and the hexagonal pavilion was already casting a shadow.

Fu Hongxue had not moved, not even his posture had changed.

The shadows grew longer and longer.

Fu Hongxue still did not move.

When the body is calm, the heart is also calm.

To a man who had long since grown accustomed to solitary and loneliness, waiting was no longer a painful thing.

To draw his sabre for the very first time, he had waited for seventeen years. However, that draw of his sabre was both meaningless and unnecessary!

He waited seventeen years to kill a person, to avenge his parents.

But when he drew his sabre, he already discovered that he wasn't a descendant of that family, and had nothing to do with that affair.

That was more than ironic.

No matter how you looked at it, this kind of irony was too cruel and malicious.

But he had accepted it, because he had no choice.

He had, henceforth, learned to endure.

If Du Lei could understand this point, perhaps he wouldn't make him wait.

while you are making others wait, you are also waiting yourself!

In this world, many matters were like a double edge sword.

When you are trying to hurt others, many a times you would end up hurting yourself the same way. Sometimes, you hurt yourself more than you hurt others!

Fu Hongxue softly breathed out, feeling totally calm.

The time was already 15 minutes past 2 PM.

...

This dark gloomy house was at the end of a long, dark and gloomy street. The original owner was a sickly and stingy old man. It was said that only when his body started to smell was his corpse was discovered.

Peacock didn't rent this house because he was stingy.

He had the ability to live in the best inns, but he preferred it here.

For him, the name "Peacock" was an irony.

His personality was definitely unlike that of the proud, gorgeous showbird. It was more like that of the bat which never saw the light of the day.

When Thumb entered, he was lying on that cold and hard wooden bed of his.

The only window of the house was also nailed shut, so it was really not unlike a bat's cave.

Thumb sat down and exhaled. He could never understand why Peacock liked to live in this place.

Peacock did not even take a single look at him. Only when his breathing quieted down, did Peacock asked, "What about Du Lei?"

Thumb, "He is still waiting."

Peacock, "When we parted ways, it was exactly 2 PM."

He added, "How long is he prepared to let Fu Hongxue waited?"

Thumb, "I already told him to wait till at least 4 PM before setting off."

Peacock broke into an evil grin, "Standing in that ghastly place and waiting for four hours is certainly no joke."

Thumb however raised an eyebrow, "But I am worried about something."

Peacock, "What is that?"

Thumb, "Although Fu Hongxue is waiting, Du Lei himself is also waiting. I only worried that he might find it more unbearable than Fu Hongxue."

Peacock softly said, "If he died under Fu Hongxue's sabre, do you suffer any loss?"

Thumb, "No."

Peacock, "Then, there is nothing to worry about."

Thumb laughed and wiped off his sweat with his sleeves, "I have good news for you."

Peacock listened on.

Thumb, "Yan Nanfei is not only poisoned, but seriously as well."

Peacock, "Where did you get this piece of news?"

Thumb, "Bought it with five hundreds taels of silver."

Peacock's eyes shined, "News that is worth five hundred taels is usually very reliable."

Thumb, "So, now we can go and kill him anytime."

Peacock, "Let's go now."

The time was exactly 15 minutes past 2 PM.

.....

Noon had long passed, and the sun's rays were getting harsher and hotter. Spring had gradually tapered off, and the long summer season would arrive soon.

Fu Hongxue disliked the summer.

Summer belonged to the children. During the day, they would frolick about naked in the ponds, roll in the grass, pick strawberries, and catch butterflies. During the night, they would sit under the melon shed, eating sweet melons chilled with well water. They would listen to the adults tell tall tales and trade gossip. They would catch a bag of fireflies, putting them into gauze pouches and exchanging them with young ladies and girls for a few pieces of candy.

The golden summer, the golden childhood, a time of everlasting joy and no pain.

However, Fu Hongxue never had a summer that truly belonged to himself.

In his memories, summers were full of sweat and blood. Hiding in the hot woods, drawing the saber; under the hot desert sun, drawing the saber!

Drawing the sabre!

Again and again, the never ending draw!

This simple action had already transformed into the most important part of his life.

When is the next time he draw his sabre?

The sabre itself is death

When the sabre is drawn, death comes.

When he draw his sabre this time, who would die?

Fu Hongxue lowered his head, gazing at the hand that held the sabre. The hand is cold, the hand is pale, the sabre pitch black.

At this moment, he heard the footstep of Du Lei.

The time was exactly 45 minutes past 2 PM.



## Chapter 7 – The Duel

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There was a small door at the corner of the back garden.

Fu Hongxue walked in from that door, and so did Du Lei.

They didn't climb over the wall.

The path was swallowed with weeds, the distance would be shorter if one cut across the grass.

However, they rather walked on the winding path.

They were walking very slowly, but once they started, they definitely would not stop.

From certain angles, they looked to share many similarities.

However, they were definitely not the same type of people, you can tell simply from their sabre.

Du Lei's sabre was richly bejeweled and glittering!

Fu Hongxue's sabre was pitch black.

But these two sabres did share one thing in common.

The two sabres are both sabres, sabres that kill.

Did these two men share something in common?

The two men are both men, men that kill!

It wasn't 4 PM yet but it was already time to draw the sabre.

Once the sabre was drawn, there would be death!

If it was not yours, than it was mine!

Du Lei's footsteps finally stopped, faced Fu Hongxue and also faced the peerless sabre in his hands.

He was determined to have this person killed under his sabre, but deep in this heart, the person he respected most was also him!

Fu Hongxue however seem to be staring at the horizon, on the horizon a dark cloud had cover up the sun.

The sun was gone, but the sun would forever not die.

What about man?

Du Lei finally opened his mouth, "I am Du, Du Lei."

Fu Hongxue, "I know!"

Du Lei, "I am late."

Fu Hongxue, "I know!"

Du Lei, "I purposely made you wait, let you wait till you were anxious. Only then would I have a chance to kill you."

Fu Hongxue, "I know!"

Du Lei suddenly laughed, "Too bad I had forgotten one point."

He laughed bitterly, "While I was making you wait, I myself was waiting as well."

Fu Hongxue, "I know!"

Du Lei laughed coldly again, "So, you know everything?"

Fu Hongxue, "At least one more thing."

Du Lei, "Let hear it."



Fu Hongxue coldly, "When I draw the sabre, you die."

Du Lei clenched his hand tightly and his pupils contracted. After a long while, he asked, "You are confident?"

Fu Hongxue, "Yes!"

Du Lei, "Then, why have you not draw your sabre?"

It was just after 2.45 PM. The dark clouds had just covered the sun, and the wind had just carried a little cold draft.

This was the most appropriate time for killing.

Mingyue was at the Bright Moon Mansion, while the bright moon was at the Bright Moon Lane.

When Thumb and Peacock stepped into Bright Moon Lane, they felt a gust of a breeze.

What a refreshing breeze.

Thumb took a deep breathe and smiled, "Today's weather is great for killing, and now is also a great time for killing."

Peacock, "Oh."

Thumb, "After killing now, we still could take a unhurried, relaxed bathe and then have a comfortable drink."

Peacock, "After that, find a woman to sleep with."

Thumb laughed with slited eyes, "Sometimes, I even get two or three."

Peacock also laughed, "You said before Mingyue Xin is also a whore."

Thumb, "That's what she is!"

Peacock, "Then, would you like to get her tonight?"

Thumb, "No."

Peacock, "Why?"

Thumb didn't directly reply to the question but slowly said, "There are many type of whores!"

Peacock, "What type is she?"

Thumb, "She happens to the type I dislike!"

Peacock asked again, "Why?"

Thumb signed and bitterly said, "Because of all the woman I had seen, she is the most formidable. If I were to shut my eyes, she would kill me."

Peacock, "What if you don't shut your eyes?"

Thumb signed again, "Even if I don't shut my eyes, she still could kill me."

Peacock, "I know your martial arts is pretty good."

Thumb, "But there are at least two women who could kill me in this world."

Peacock, "She is one of them?"

Thumb signed and nodded.

Peacock, "Who is the other one?"

Thumb, "2nd Miss Ni, Ni Hui."

As he finished this sentence, a pearl of laughter was heard. Crisp and clear, as lovely as silver bells.

The lane had high walls on both sides, and on top of the high walls were some foliage.

Spring was deep, as was the foliage.

The laughter came from deep within the foliage.

“Bad Fatty, how did you know I am eavesdropping”

“I didn’t know.” Thumb quickly denied.

“Then why are you purposely flattering me?” The laughter was beautiful, the girl was beautiful, and the lightness technique was even more beautiful. When she floated down from the top of the wall, it was like a cloud, like a petal.

A peach blossom petal just blown loose by the spring breeze, a piece of cloud that just flew out of the sky.

Thumb saw her shadow, but she herself had disappeared.

When Thumb followed her shadow to the other side of foliage, where it disappeared, his eyes slitted to a smile again.

“That is 2nd Miss Ni.”

“Why did she come and go so suddenly?” Peacock couldn’t help to ask.

“Because she wanted us to know that she is better than Mingyue Xin.” Thumb’s eyes were still centered at where her shadow disappeared. “So that we could set our minds to ease and kill Yan Nanfei.”

“There is one thing I don’t understand.”

“What is it?”

“Why must we kill Yan Nanfei?” Peacock probed, “What kind of man is he? Why nobody in the martial world has ever heard of his background?”

“That is something that you best not ask.” Thumb’s manner abruptly became very strict. “If you want to ask, you better prepare one item.”

“What do you want me to prepare?”

“A coffin.”

Peacock did not ask again. When he lifted up his head, a piece of dark cloud had covered up the moonlight.

When this piece of dark cloud covered up the moonlight, Mingyue Xin was facing a embroidery of wild roses by the window.

She was also embroidering wild roses, the wild roses of spring.

Spring was old.

The wild roses were also old.

Yan Nanfei was lying on the bed, not moving an inch, his pale face was not unlike Fu Hongxue's.

The wind was blowing lightly from the window, the wind was cold, cold as the cruel autumn.

Suddenly, she heard their noises.

Their footsteps were lighter than the wind, their voices were colder than the wind.

"Tell Yan Nanfei to come down quickly."

"If he doesn't come down, we would go up."

Mingyue Xin exhaled, she knew Yan Nanfei would certainly not go down and they would certainly come up.

That was because Yan Nanfei didn't want to kill them. It was them that wanted to kill Yan Nanfei. Hence, Yan Nanfei could lie down comfortably in bed, while they had to bring their weapon, make their way to the lane, knock on the door and hurriedly burst in, for fear of missing the chance to kill.

The murderer and the murdered. Who is the noble one, while who was the despicable one? A question that no one could answer.

She again lowered her head to her embroidery.

She did not hear footsteps, nor knockings on the door, but she knew that someone was already outside the door.

"Come in." She didn't even lift her head "The door is unlatched, you only need to push."

Although the door would be opened with a gentle shove, nobody opened it.

"Since the two of you are here to kill, you don't really expect your victim himself to open the door in welcome, do you?"

Her voice was very gentle, but to Peacock and Thumb it was sharper than a needle.

Today's weather was great for killing, and now was a great time for killing. They were initially in great spirits.

But now, they were feeling a little unhappy because the supposed victim seemed to be far more relaxed than they were. They were standing outside the door like fools, their heartbeat already doubled.

Alas, killing wasn't such a happy thing after all.

Peacock looked at Thumb, Thumb looked at Peacock. Both of them were asking themselves: Is Yan Nanfei really poisoned? Is there an ambush behind the door waiting for them?

Actually, they both knew that all their questions would be answered by opening the door.

But neither of them made a move.

"When you enter, keep your footsteps light." Mingyue Xin's voice was even more gentle now, "Mr. Yan is poisoned and is now sleeping soundly. Please do not disturb his rest."

Thumb abruptly laughed. "She is Yan Nanfei's friend, she know we are here to kill Yan Nanfei. But it seems that she is worried that we don't dare to enter and kill him. What do you think she is up to?"

Peacock coldly said, "That's because she is a woman; a woman by nature would betray a man any time."

Thumb, "Not so."

Peacock, "Then what do you think she is up to?"

Thumb, "That is because she knew that the more that she acts in such a way, the more suspicious we would be and the more likely to back off."

Peacock, "You are speaking quite reasonably. You've always understood women better than me."

Thumb, "Then what are you waiting for?"

Peacock, "Waiting for you to open the door"

Thumb, "The one killing is you."

Peacock, "The one opening is you."

Thumb laughed again, "You never take any risk, do you?"

Peacock, "Right."

Thumb laughing, "Being partners with a person like you is really enjoyable, because you would surely live longer than than me. When I die, you could at least recover my body."

Still smiling, he lightly tapped the door with his fingers. With just that, the door opened. Mingyue Xin was still embroidering in front of the window, and Yan Nanfei was still lying on the bed like a dead man.

Thumb breathed out, "Please enter."

Peacock, "You would not go in?"

Thumb, "You kill people, I open doors. I've done my part, it is now your turn."

Peacock stared at him for a long time, suddenly said, "There is something that I had never told you."

Thumb, "Huh.."

Peacock coldly, "I loathed you the moment I set my eyes on you, and on at least three occasions I had wanted to kill you."

Thumb however was still smiling, "Luckily for me, on this occasion the one you want to kill is not me, but Yan Nanfei."

Peacock was silent.

Thumb pushed the door again to open it up wider. "This way, please."

Inside, the room was very quiet and very dark. The moonlight outside the window was completely blocked out by dark clouds.

The time is 4 PM.

Peacock finally entered the room. When he entered, his hands had gone under his sleeves with the Peacock Plume in his fingers.

The ice-cold and glossy Peacock Plume is a hidden weapon without peer in the world.

His heart was again filled with confidence.

Mingyue Xin lifted up her head, looked at him and laughed, "So, you are the Peacock?"

Peacock, "Peacock's aren't funny."

Mingyue Xin, "But you don't look like peacock, really don't."

Peacock, "You also don't look like a whore."

Mingyue Xin laughed again.

Peacock, "Being a whore isn't funny either."

Mingyue Xin, "But there is something else which is funny."

Peacock, "What is that?"

Mingyue Xin, "You don't look like peacock, but are Peacock. I don't look a whore but am a whore. A donkey looks very much like a horse but isn't a horse at all."

She smiled, "In this world, there are so many matters that are just like that."

Peacock, "What do you really trying to say?"

Mingyue Xin, "For example, the hidden weapon in your person clearly looks like the Peacock Plume, but isn't the Peacock Plume."

Peacock laughed loudly, a big laugh.

A person would only laughed this hard if he had heard the most ridiculous and impossible joke.

Mingyue Xin, "The truth is that in your heart, you had long suspected this. Because you had felt that its power isn't as fearsome as it wa said to be. That's why you did not dare to use it against Fu Hongxue."

Peacock was still laughing, but his laughter was a little forced.

Mingyue Xin, "It is a pity that although you had your suspicions, you couldn't verify them, and also did not dare to verify them."

Peacock couldn't help but to ask, "Can you prove it?"

Mingyue Xin, "I can prove it, and only I am the only one who can, because..."

Peacock, "Because what?"

Mingyue Xin softly, "The kind of Peacock Plume you have, I have a few of them remaining. I can give you a few any time you like."

Peacock's face changed colour. Outside the door, Thumb's face also changed colour.

Mingyue Xin, "I can give you another one right now. Here, take it."



Incredibly, she really did reach into her sleeve and took out a glittering golden cylinder. Casually, she threw it at Peacock, just like when one bestowed a single copper coin to a beggar.

Peacock reached out his hand and caught it. After a quick look, he looked someone who had been kicked in the stomach.

Mingyue Xin, "Why don't you check if this Peacock Plume is exactly the same as the one you have?"

Peacock did not answer. He didn't need to answer.

Anyone who could see his expressions, could already guess the answer.

Thumb already started to move stealthily backwards.

Peacock suddenly turned back and stared at him, "Why didn't you strike out and kill me?"

Thumb with a forced laugh, "We are partners, why should I kill you?"

Peacock, "Because I want to kill you. All along I wanted to kill you, and now I have to kill you no matter what!"

Thumb, "But I don't want to kill you, because there is no need for me to strike with my own hands."

He really laughed, laughed so hard that his eyes had turned into slits. "In the martial world, if there is just a single person who knows that you are not the real Peacock, within six hours, you would be a dead peacock."

Peacock, "Unfortunately, you've forgotten one thing."

Thumb, "Hrm?"

Peacock, "Although this Peacock Plume is a fake, to kill you, it is more than enough."

Thumb's smile hardened, and his body sprang up.

Although his reaction was slow at all, but he was still a step too late.

A ray of blinding light had already shot out of the golden cylinder in Peacock's hands.

As magnificent as the setting sun, as beautiful as the rainbow.

Thumb ugly and fat body was instantly swallowed up by this ray of beautiful light, just like the ugly sand swallowed up by the beautiful tide.

When this ray of light faded, his life was also gone.

With a clap of thunder, raindrops started to fall from the dark clouds.

At last Mingyue Xin breathed out and said, "You are certainly right. Although this Peacock Plume is fake, it still has the power to kill."

Peacock had already turned already and stared at her, "That's why I could also use it to kill you."

Mingyue Xin, "I know that. If you would kill even Thumb to ensure his silence, you certainly would not spare me."

Peacock, "After you died, nobody would know if this Peacock Plume is real or fake."

Mingyue Xin, "It is true that apart from me, nobody else knows this secret."

Peacock, "Du Lei would wait till 4 PM before showing up, so if I rush there after I kill you, it would be just right. Regardless of who is the victor of that duel, he would also die under my hands."

Mingyue Xin, "Your plan is very thorough. Unfortunately, you have neglected one thing."

Peacock shut up and waited for her to continue.

Mingyue Xin, "You had neglected to ask me why I know that this Peacock Plume is fake."

Peacock indeed asked immediately, "How do you know?"

Mingyue Xin softly said, "The reason why I am the only one that know this secret is because the one making these fake Peacock Plumes is me."

Peacock was stunned again.

Mingyue Xin, "If I could make these kinds of Peacock Plume, and dared to give one to you so casually. Naturally, I am confident that I can defeat it!"

Peacock's face had turned white. His hands were trembling.

His ability to kill was perhaps not because he had the Peacock Plume, but because he had a heart filled with self confidence and a steady pair of hands.

Now these two things had been destroyed.

Mingyue Xin, "The first Peacock Plume was also arranged by me for you to find. I had looked for a long time before I chose you to be my peacock. Because in the martial world there are not many people who are better suited then you, therefore I would not casually allow you to die. However..."

She stared at him, eyes that were as gentle as the bright moon had suddenly turned as sharp as a blade. "If you want to continue to be my peacock, you should learn to be as obedient as a peacock. If you have any doubt, you can strike now."

Peacock clenched both his hands tightly but still couldn't stop trembling.

He looked at both his hands and suddenly bended over and began to vomited!

...

A ring of thunder, raindrops fell from the dark clouds.

"I have not drawn my sabre because I am confident."

Fu Hongxue's voice seem very far away, far in the dark clouds. "When a person wants to kill, very often it is not unlike begging for a favour. He becomes very despicable. Because he does not have the utmost confidence, he would become very anxious in great fear of missing a good opportunity."

He very seldom talked so much. He spoke very slowly, as if fearing that Du Lei could not bear it.

It was because he knew that every one of his words had pierced Du Lei's heart like a blade.

Du Lei entire body had stiffened up. Even his voice had become coarse. "So you have the utmost confidence in yourself. That's why you are not anxious?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Du Lei, "When are you going to draw your sabre?"

Fu Hongxue, "When you draw yours!"

Du Lei, "What if I don't draw mine?"

Fu Hongxue, "You certainly will draw your sabre. In fact, you are very anxious to draw it!"

Because you want to kill me, but not me who want to kill you!

That's why the true moment you really die is not when I draw my sabre, but when you draw yours.

Green veins had already protruded out of Du Lei's sabre wielding hand.

He had not drawn, but he himself knew that he had to draw sooner or later!

The ice cold raindrops pelted on his body, on his face. He was facing Fu Hongxue, facing the most peerless sabre in the world. Suddenly his mind went back to his lowly childhood.

Heavy rain pounded the mud, the mud had soiled the whole street.

He ran barefooted in the mud, because someone was chasing behind.

He had escaped from the escort office, where he had stolen an escort officer's new shoes. The shoes were too big for him and had fallen off before he made it halfway across the street.

But the officer still would not spare him. After the officer caught him, he stripped him naked, tied him to a tree and lashed him with a cane.

When he faced Fu Hongxue now, his heart suddenly had that feeling again, the pain of being lashed.

An agonizing pain that was beyond words, an agonizing pain that he could never forget.

The rain was getting heavier, and the soil on the ground had turned into mud.

Without warning, he took off the pair of soft soled shoes that cost him eighteen taels of silver, and stood barefooted in the mud.

Fu Hongxue seem to have turned into the escort officer who lashed him with the cane, turned into a symbol of his agonizing pain.

He roared madly and tore off his clothings.

He stood stark naked in the rain and mud, howling madly. All these years of self restraint and control had finally found a release.

So, he drew his sabre.

The moment he drew his sabre was the moment of his death.

So, he died!

Death was not only passion, but also pain. These two things were something that he had never able to attain at the same moment. But at the moment of “death”, he did.

.....

The rain stopped as abruptly as it came.

The path was still caked with mud. Fu Hongxue walked slowly but steadily on the path, his hand clenched on his sabre.

The sabre was back in the sheath. The blood on the sabre was cleaned off. The sabre was still pitch black.

His pupils were also pitch black, deep and black, enough to conceal all the mercy and sorrow of his heart.

A ray of sunlight had broke through the cover of dark clouds, no doubt the last light of the day.

The sunlight shone on the high wall. Suddenly from behind the wall there was a peal of laughter. A laughter crisp and clear, and as lovely as silver bells, but carrying a strange ridicule.

Ni Hui appeared under the sunlight, "Not exciting, not exciting to watch at all."

What was not exciting to watch?

Fu Hongxue did not ask. His footsteps didn't even slow down.

But wherever he went, Ni Hui followed, "Your duel wasn't exciting to watch at all. I had came to see your sabre-play, but who would have expected that what you used was a trick."

She explained further, "You let Du Lei strike first. On the surface, it is letting him take the initiative. However, it was a trick."

Why was it a trick?

Fu Hongxue did not ask, but his footsteps had stopped.

Ni Hui, "When a sabre in the sheath, it has hidden strength and power, and nobody knows its sharpness. When a sabre is drawn out of the sheath, its sharpness is revealed, and thus nobody would dare to take it lightly. Thus, a sabre is at its most priceless at the moment when it is about to strike but yet to strike."

She continued, "You, of course understand this principle, that's why you let Du Lei strike first..."

Fu Hongxue had been quietly listening but he suddenly cut her off, "That is also sabre-play, not a trick."

Ni Hui, "No?"

Fu Hongxue, "Sabre-play has different techniques and variations, but all share one essence."

Her expression was very solemn, "That is the highest level of the sabre-play?"

Fu Hongxue, "Not yet!"

Ni Hui, "Then at which stage can one achieve the highest peak of sabre-play?"

Fu Hongxue had yet again fallen silent and continued forward!

The sun was shining bright.

The last ray of sunlight is often the most the gloriously beautiful – sometimes life is also the same.

Ni Hui stood stumped at the wall for a long time, "Don't tell me that highest peak of sabreplay is achieved only when there is no variations at all."

The shinning bright sun had dimmed in a flash.

No variations at all, could that be to surpass the limits of variations? In that case, does that sabre still have any reason to exist?

Fu Hongxue sighed in this heart. Even he could not answer that question.

Why does the sabre need to exist? Why does man need to exist?

The sunlight had disappeared on the high walls, and Ni Hui had also disappeared with the sun.

But the sun still existed, and Ni Hui too still existed. What had disappeared momentarily was only their image – their image in Fu Hongxue's vision.

Fu Hongxue pushed opened the door beneath the high walls and slowly walked in. As soon as he lifted his head, he saw Mingyue Xin at the high mansion.

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Despite being on the tall mansion, Fu Hongxue's head was hanging down.

Mingxue Xin asked, "You won?"

Fu Hongxue did not answer. By being alive, he had answered.

Mingxue Xin unexpectedly signed, "Why, why must it be like this?"

Fu Hongxue didn't quite catch her, "Why?"

Mingyue Xin, "You went despite knowing that you would win for sure. He went despite knowing that he would die for sure."

This is a deep and profound question but Fu Hongxue could explained it, "Because he is Du Lei and I am Fu Hongxue."

His explanation was like his sabre. It cut into the heart of the question in one stroke. Mingyue Xin however was still not satisfied, "So, Du Lei had to die because there is a Fu Hongxue in the this world."

Fu Hongxue, "No."

Mingyue Xin, "Then, what did you really mean?"

Fu Hongxue, "Du Lei had to die because there was a Du Lei in this world."

His answer on the surface seem more deep and profound than the question, but it was actually very simple, very reasonable.

Without life, there is no death.

With life, there is no escaping from death.

Mingyue could not help but to sign again, "It seems that with regards to life and death, you view them very lightly."



Fu Hongxue did not deny it.

Mingyue Xin, "Regarding the life and death of other people, you definitely view it lightly. That is why you left Yan Nanfei back here."

Fu Hongxue was silent. After a long while, he slowly asked, "Did Peacock come here?"

Mingyue Xin, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue, "Yan Nanfei is still alive?"

Mingyue Xin, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue softly said, "When I left him here, perhaps I already knew that he would not die."

Mingyue Xin, "But, you..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted her, "As long as your decision has not changed, my promise to you also would not change."

Mingyue Xin, "What is your promise?"

Fu Hongxue, "Bring you both to Peacock Manor."

Mingyue Xin's eyes lighted up, "Now?"

Fu Hongxue, "Now."

Mingyue Xin jumped up and turned her back, "Do you want me to put on that mask?"

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "Don't you already have a mask on your face?"

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## Chapter 8 – Peacock Manor

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A person's face is a mask to begin with! If one can change one's face at will based on one's environment or mood, no one can read that person's expressions and discover what secrets lie hidden in that person's mind.

What type of mask could possibly be more clever and ingenious than one's face?

The faces of people with high status and of high standings are usually unreadable masks.

When Mingyue Xin saw Qiu Shuiqing, the first question in her mind was, "I wonder what type of mask he wears on his face?"

Regardless of what mask he might wear, for the master of the Peacock Manor to personally welcome them is certainly something to be happy about.

Brilliant and beautiful are the plumes of a peacock. Brilliant and beautiful is the Peacock Manor.

Dark green tiles glowed with jade brilliance under the rays of the setting sun. The white stone steps were as beautiful as jade, passing between golden walls. It seemed as though this entire place was built out of gold, pearls, jewels, and jade.

Several peacocks spread their plumes beneath a peach tree in the garden. Upon the pond floated mandarin ducks.

Several girls dressed in silks quietly walked past the soft, verdant grass, disappearing into the depths of a forest of flowers, disappearing into this multicolored, splendid garden.

The wind carried the faint scent of drunken pleasure. From afar, it sounded as though someone were playing the flute. The world seemed filled with peace and harmony.

All three great gates to the house were wide open. Nary a single gatekeeper could be seen.

Qiu Shuiqing was right there, standing on top of those white stone steps, calmly gazing at Fu Hongxue.

He was a very conservative person, in words and deeds. Even if his heart was bursting with joy, he definitely wouldn't reveal any hint of it.

When he saw Fu Hongxue, he only lightly smiled. "I didn't imagine that you would come, but you came at a perfect time!"

Fu Hongxue asked, "Why is this a perfect time?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "We happen to have a guest here tonight, and he's not any ordinary guest."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth. No expression could be seen on his face whatsoever. Unexpectedly, Mingyue Xin also remained composed.

Qiu Shuiqing glanced at her, then glanced at Yan Nanfei, who had been carried to this place. "They are your friends?"

Fu Hongxue neither admitted to it nor denied it. Even he wasn't sure whether they were friends or enemies.

Qiu Shuiqing didn't ask again. He only turned his body sideways and said, "Please enter."

Two people carried Yan Nanfei into the room, with Mingyue Xin following behind them. She suddenly came to a stop. Staring at Qiu Shuiqing, she said, "Manor-master, aren't you going to ask why we are here?"

Qiu Shuiqing shook his head.

Since you are friends of Fu Hongxue, there is no need for me to ask. Since there is no need for me to ask, there is no need for me to speak.

He was always a man of few words.

Mingyue Xin, however, refused to shut up. She said, "Manor-master, even though you didn't ask, I am still going to tell you."

Since she insisted on telling him, Qiu Shuiqing listened.

Mingyue Xin said, "We have come for two reasons. First, to avoid misfortune. Second, to beg for medical assistance. Manor-master, can you take a look at his illness?"

Qiu Shuiqing finally spoke. "What type of illness is it?"

Ming Yuexin said, "Anxiety."

Qiu Shuiqing suddenly turned his head and stared at her. "Anxiety can only be treated with mental medicine."

Mingyue Xin said, "Yes, I know..."

Just as she spoke these three words, Yan Nanfei shot out of his stretcher like an arrow from a bow.

Mingyue Xin made her move as well!

One of them was in front of Qiu Shuiqing. The other was behind him.

With one in front, and the other behind, they had sealed away all of Qiu Shuiqing's escape paths!

There is no such thing as a perfect, flawless technique. This assault of theirs, however, approached flawlessness.

No one could discover a flaw in their movements, and no one could block or dodge this attack. As a matter of fact, nobody could have possibly imagined that they would suddenly attack like this.

Their attack was undoubtedly carefully planned in advance, and undoubtedly had been practiced many times.

And thus was the master of the Peacock Manor, whose fame shook the world, defeated on the doorsteps of his very own home, without even a chance to counter-attack.

In the blink of an eye, the two of them sealed several major acupoints on his arms and his legs.

Qiu Shuiqing actually didn't fall down, because they were supporting him.

Although his body was now stiff and inflexible, the expression on his face was still calm. Even if you searched the whole world over, you couldn't find more than ten people who would be able to maintain their calm in this situation.

After Mingyue Xin launched her attack and struck out with her palm, she lightly took another breath, then finished her earlier words. "It's precisely because I know that anxiety can only be cured with mental medicine, that we have come here to find you."

Qiu Shuiqing didn't even glance at her. He only coldly stared at Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue remained totally expressionless.

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Do you know why they came here?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Qiu Shuiqing said, "But you brought them here."

Fu Hongxue said, "That's because I too am curious as to why they wanted to come here."

The two of them only spoke three sentences. The flower garden which had been filled with peace and tranquility suddenly became filled with a murderous air.

The killing aura came from the blades of forty nine swords and sabres. Light reflecting off the the sabres and shadows cast by the swords flickered, but the people wielding the weapons did not. With the life of the master of their manor in the hands of others, no one dared to make any rash moves.

Qiu Shuiqing suddenly let out a sigh. "Yan Nanfei, Yan Nanfei. How could you do something like this?"

Yan Nanfei was very startled. "You knew who I was all along?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "All the land within an eighty li radius belongs to the Peacock Manor. As soon as you entered my territory, I knew who you are and learned everything about you."

Yan Nanfei also let out a sigh. "It seems as though the Peacock Manor really isn't a place where one can come and go as one pleases."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "It's precisely because I know too much about you and your origins, that you were able to subdue me thusly."

Yan Nanfei said, "Because you didn't imagine that I would act like this?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "I truly did not."

Yan Nanfei forced a smile. "To be honest, even I can't imagine it."

Mingyue Xin interjected, "He had no other choice. His illness really is too severe."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Do I have medicine that can save him?"

Mingyue Xin said, "You do. Only you do."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "What medicine is it, exactly?"

Mingyue Xin said, "A secret."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "A secret? What secret?"

Mingyue Xin said, "The secret of the Peacock Plume."

Qiu Shuiqing shut his mouth.

Mingyue Xin said, "This isn't solely a case of us coercing you. This is a trade."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "What will you use to trade?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Another secret. It's also a secret of the Peacock Plume."

Dusk had fallen. Lanterns were lit. The room was quiet, tastefully laid out, and peaceful. Qiu Shuiqing undoubtedly was a man of elegant tastes.

A pity that his guests were not here to appreciate his refined tastes. As soon as they entered the room, Mingyue Xin went straight to the main point. "Actually, I too know that the Peacock Plume was lost during the era of your great-grandfather, Qiu Fengwu."

This was a secret. A secret that no one in the martial world knew.

For the first time, Qiu Shuiqing's expression changed. "How do you know this?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Because Qiu Fengwu took the Peacock Painting and went to find a person. He begged that person to build a second Peacock Plume."

The Peacock Painting was another secret. It contained within it the graphs and charts needed to build the Peacock Plume.

No one knew whether the Peacock Painting came first, or the Peacock Plume came first. Everyone was certain, however, that with the Peacock Painting, it would be possible to create a second Peacock Plume.

Mingyue Xin said, "However, this line of thinking is wrong."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "How do you know this line of thinking is wrong?"

Mingyue Xin said, "The construction of the mechanisms in a hidden projectile is a very complicated procedure that requires a very high degree of skill."

Not only did it require a calm, steady, sure hand, it also required metallurgical knowledge as well as an understanding of the principle tenets of hidden projectiles.

Mingyue Xin said, "The person whom Qiu Fengwu sought out was naturally the best artisan of his time."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "The best artisan of that time was said to be Madame Xu of Sichuan's Tang family."

The poisonous hidden projectiles of the Tang family had been world-famous for over four centuries. It was taught to daughter-in-laws, but never to daughters.

Madame Xu was the elder daughter-in-law of the Tang family at that time. Embroidery and manufacturing hidden projectiles were said to be her two consummate, unequalled skills.

Mingyue Xin said, "However, although Madame Xu spent six years of painstaking care and labor, exhausting herself so utterly that even her hair turned white, she was unable to create a second Peacock Plume."

Qiu Shuiqing simply watched her, waiting for her to continue.

Mingyue Xin took out magnificent, resplendent golden tube before she continued. "Within those six years, Madame Xu did produce four Peacock Plumes. But although they looked identical to the original, and were constructed strictly in accordance with the design mandated by the Peacock Painting, for some reason they lacked the mysterious, magical power of the original."

Gazing at the golden tube in her hand, Qiu Shuiqing said, "This is one of them?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Correct."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Recently, a person nicknamed 'Peacock' appeared in the martial world..."

Mingyue Xin said, "His Peacock Plume is one of them as well."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "You gave it to him?"

Mingyue Xin said, "I didn't personally give it to him. I only arranged for him to stumble across it."



Qiu Shuiqing said, "Because you intentionally wanted the rumor to be spread throughout the world the secret of the disappearance of the Peacock Plume."

Mingyue Xin did not deny it.

Since the Peacock Plume appeared in the hands of others, naturally it could not be at the Peacock Manor.

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Why did you do this?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Because I began to suspect something."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Suspect what?"

Mingyue Xin said, "The Peacock Plume is the lifeline of the Peacock Manor, and every successive master of the Peacock Manor has been an extremely careful, extremely steady person. Thus..."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Thus you always doubted whether or not the Peacock Plume actually went missing."

Mingyue Xin nodded. "Supposedly, the Peacock Plume was lost by Qiu Yifeng, the father of Qiu Fengwu. Qiu Yifeng possessed amazing intelligence and ability. How could he possibly have done something so foolish? Perhaps he was merely testing his son's ability to deal with sudden, unexpected situations when he claimed he lost it."

Although her words were logical, there was no real proof behind them.

Mingyue Xin continued, "Thus, I intentionally revealed this secret, so as to cause the enemies of the Peacock Manor to come here."

Qiu Shuiqing coldly said, "Not a single person was able to leave alive."

Mingyue Xin said, "Thus, I felt that my conjecture was certainly correct. The Peacock Plume must still be in your hands."

Qiu Shuiqing once more shut his mouth, but his sharp, keen, eagle-like gaze never left Mingyue Xin.

Mingyue Xin continued, "Afterwards, Qiu Fengwu did not seek out Madame Xu again. Naturally, this was because he found the original Peacock Plume."

Qiu Shuiqing was silent for a long time. Finally, he said unhurriedly, "Perhaps he never should have sought her out to begin with."

Mingyue Xin said, "But he trusted her. Before Madame Xu was married, the two of them were friends."

Qiu Shuiqing coldly laughed. "There are many people in the world who would sell out their friends."

Mingyue Xin said, "But Madame Xu did not sell him out. Aside from the direct heirs of the Tang family, no one else knows this secret!"

The light in Qiu Shuiqing's eyes grew even more keen. "And you? What relationship do you have to the Tang family?"

Mingyue Xin grinned. "I never intended to hide this from you to begin with."

She slowly continued, "I am the eldest daughter of the Tang family. My original name was Tang Lan."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Why is it that a child of the Tang family would become a courtesan?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Although the Tang family specializes in using poisonous hidden projectiles, our rules are much stricter than that of the Seven Great Sects. The children of the Tang family have never been allowed to get involved in the matters of the martial world."

Her voice was tranquil but unyielding. "But we are determined to come out and do something."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "What is your target?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Oppression. Our goals can be summarized in four words."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "To revolt against oppression?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Right! To revolt against oppression!"

She continued, "We do not dare to go against the rules of our family. So as to allow ourselves to move about more freely, I have hidden myself within the courtesan's world. Over the past three years, we have organized ourselves into a force which can resist oppression. Unfortunately, we still aren't strong enough."

Yan Nanfei said, "This is because our enemy is even more tightly organized, and their force is even greater."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Who is their leader?"

Yan Nanfei said, "A person who deserves to die."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "He is the source of your anxiety?"

Yan Nanfei admitted to it.

Qiu Shuiqing said, "You want to use my Peacock Plume to kill him?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Use violence to defeat violence, and kill to stop a killer!"

Qiu Shuiqing looked at him, then looked at Fu Hongxue. He suddenly said, "Release the acupoints on my legs, then come with me!"

They walked past a giant, beautiful mural, passed through a maple grove, and a clump of bamboo. Just after they crossed a bridge with nine bends, the lamp light seemed to scatter and dissipate.

The dark courtyard seemed to carry an unspeakably gloomy, sinister, desolate aura. Even the lamp light shied away from it.

Compared to the magnificent, splendid, palace-like pavilion from earlier, this was a totally different world.

The tall, lofty building was filled with a ghastly cold.

There were over a hundred small lanterns lit within the room. Giving off a sad, eerie light, they looked like so many will'o'the'wisps.

In front of every small lantern was a memorial tablet.

A name was carved onto every memorial tablet. Each and every single name belonged to an illustrious figure. Several of the names belonged to people who, not long ago, were brief celebrities of the martial world who considered themselves without peer!

After seeing the row of memorial tablets, Mingyue Xin's expression also became very solemn.

She knew that these were all people who died to the Peacock Plume. She hoped to add another memorial tablet and another name to this place.

"Gongzi Yu!"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Our ancestors feared that their descendants would accumulate too much evil karma through their killings, and so set up a memorial site here, so as to help expiate their sins and propitiate the souls of the damned!"

Next, he took them into the heart of the Peacock Manor. They entered through a paved path through the tomb.

The path they took was tortuous and winding. An innumerable number of iron bars and railings could be seen.

Everyone silently followed behind him. They felt as though they had suddenly entered the mausoleum of some ancient, long-dead emperor. The place was gloomy, damp, and mysterious.

The very last iron gate was formed from a steel plate which was over three feet thick. It weighed more than a thousand jin.

There were thirteen locks on the gate.

"The thirteen keys were originally guarded by thirteen different people. Nowadays, though, trustworthy friends are become fewer and fewer in number."

Thus, nowadays only six people guarded the keys. All of them were old men with white and gray hair. They numbered amongst them trusted family

friends of the Peacock Family and illustrious old veterans of the martial world.

They all had different backgrounds and various statuses. However, their friendship and loyalty were equally trusted by Qiu Shuiqing.

Their proficiency in martial arts, naturally, was even more worthy of trust. Qiu Shuiqing simply clapped his hands, and all six of them appeared out of nowhere like ghosts. The person who appeared the fastest had a gaze like an eagle, and moved like an eagle as well. His experienced, wizened face was crisscrossed with scars and healed wounds. He appeared to be the “Immortal Eagle of Heaven,” Gongsun Tu, whose fame shook the world in years past.

The keys were attached to them with an iron chain. The very last key was held by Qiu Shuiqing.

Mingyue Xin watched as he opened the very last lock. By the time she turned her head around, the six guardians had disappeared. It was as though the ancestors of the Qiu family had specially sent the six of them from the netherworld, to act as guardian ghosts over this forbidden area.

Behind the steel gate was a large stone room. The walls were covered with bluish green moss, and six lamps burned.

Underneath the ghastly, gloomy glow of the lamps, all sorts of strange, exotic weapons could be seen on many wooden racks. Some of them not even Yan Nanfei had seen before, and it was unknown as to whether they had been used by the ancestors of the Qiu family, or by the Qiu family’s enemies. Although these weapons were still here, their skeletons and framework had long since rotted away.

Qiu Shuiqing pushed aside a giant boulder, revealing a steel cabinet hidden behind it. Could it be that the Peacock Plume was hidden in here?

Everyone watched with bated breath as he opened the steel cabinet and reverently, respectfully withdrew a wooden box from within.

No one imagined that within the wooden box, there lay not the Peacock Plume, but a thin yellow skin.

Mingyue Xin didn't try to hide her disappointment. Wrinkling her forehead, she said, "What's this?"

The expression on Qiu Shuiqing's face became even more solemn and respectful. "This is a person's face."

Disappointed, Mingyue Xin said, "Is it skin that was carved from a person's face?"

Qiu Shuiqing nodded. His eyes were filled with sorrow. In a dejected voice, he said, "This person lost something that was extremely important. He felt as though he no longer had any face or any right to continue living. Before he committed suicide, he told his servants to carve his skin from his face after his death, to serve as an admonition for future generations."

He did not say this person's name, but everyone knew who it was he was speaking about.

The news of Qiu Yifeng's sudden death was, in that time, a story which caused great suspicion. Only now did Qiu Shuiqing reveal the truth of the matter.

All the hairs on Mingyue Xin's body began to rise. After a long time, she let out a long sigh. "You shouldn't have revealed something like this to me."

With a calm expression, Qiu Shuiqing said, "I didn't want to reveal this either, but I needed for you to believe me. The Peacock Plume disappeared long ago from the Peacock Manor."

Mingyue Xin said, "But those people who recently died at the Peacock Manor..."

Qiu Shuiqing interrupted her. He coldly said, "There are many ways to kill someone. It isn't necessary to use the Peacock Plume."

Mingyue Xin stared at the human-skin within the wooden box. When she thought of the tragic and pitiful suicide of that man, who took his own life to atone for his sin, she wished that she had never come here.

Yan Nanfei clearly felt a similar regret in his heart. Just at this moment, a clanking sound could be heard as the metal gate swung shut!

Next, a series of clicking sounds could be heard. Obviously, the thirteen keyholes outside had all been locked.

The expression on Mingyue Xin's face changed. Yan Nanfei sighed. "As we should not have come here, nor heard this secret, much less disturbed the rest of this elder's spirit. We do deserve to die."

Qiu Shuiqing calmly watched them, not revealing any expression on his face.

Yan Nanfei said, "But my life still belongs to Fu Hongxue. Fu Hongxue doesn't deserve to die."

Qiu Shuiqing coldly said, "I do not deserve to die either."

Yan Nanfei stared at him, astonished. Mingyue Xin interjected, "This wasn't your intention, then?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "It is not."

Mingyue Xin was even more shocked. "Then who locked us in here? Who could possibly enter such a secret area?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "There are at least six people who do."

Mingyue Xin said, "But all of them are your good friends."

Qiu Shuiqing said, "As I said earlier. There are many people in the world who are willing to sell out their friends!"

Fu Hongxue finally spoke. "Out of those six people, there only needs to be one traitor."

Mingyue Xin said, "Who are you referring to?"

Fu Hongxue did not reply. Instead, he asked Qiu Shuiqing, "Was the person who opened the very first lock Gongsun Tu?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Yes."

Mingyue Xin interrupted, "Is it that 'Immortal Eagle of Heaven', the Gongsun Tu who should have died many times over by now?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Yes."

Yan Nanfei asked, "His very last duel to the death, was it with Gongzi Yu?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "Yes."

Yan Nanfei looked at Mingyue Xin. Mingyue Xin looked at Fu Hongxue. All three of them shut their mouths.

There was no need to ask anything further.

Everyone in the martial world was astonished at how Gongsun Tu managed to survive his fight with Gongzi Yu.

Only now did they realize that there was nothing astonishing about it at all. Gongzi Yu intentionally let Gongsun Tu live, while bribing him at the same time.

Now, the only question which needed to be asked was, "Is there a second way out of here?"

"None."

Qiu Shuiqing's response was very succinct. A secret storehouse for precious goods really should not have a second way in or out!

Mingyue Xin let out a breath. It seemed as though her entire body was about to collapse.

The metal gate was three feet thick. The stone walls were six feet thick. No matter who was locked within this stone room, the only thing they could do was to await death.

Yan Nanfei suddenly asked, "Is there any wine here?"

Qiu Shuiqing said, "There is. There's only one jug of wine. Poison wine!"

Yan Nanfei grinned. "Poison wine is better than no wine."



Why would a person waiting for certain death be afraid of poisoned wine?

He located the jug of wine, then broke open the seal. But suddenly, there was the flash of a sabre and the jug of wine was also shattered.

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "Don't forget that your life still belongs to me. Even if you want to die, you need to allow me to kill you."

Yan Nanfei said, "When do you plan to make your move?"

Fu Hongxue said, "When all hope is lost."

Yan Nanfei asked, "What hope do we have right now?"

Fu Hongxue said, "As long as you are alive, there is hope!"

Yan Nanfei laughed loudly. "Wonderful! Well said! So long as there is a single breath left in my body, I won't forget those words."

Fu Hongxue didn't say so much as another word. It seemed as though he had suddenly become fascinated by the various weapons on the wooden shelves.

He slowly walked over to them, carefully examining every single weapon.

The cold, gloomy room gradually became hot and suffocating. Qiu Shuiqing blew out three of the lanterns. Fu Hongxue suddenly removed a chain whip from one of the shelves.

The chain whip was made out of links of pure steel. It should be extremely heavy, and yet it didn't seem as heavy as it appeared to be!

Fu Hongxue muttered to himself, then asked, "What is the origin of this weapon?"

Qiu Shuiqing didn't directly answer him. First, he withdrew a very thick accounting book from a cabinet. He blew the dust off of it, then flipped for ten or so pages before unhurriedly saying, "This was left behind by Hai Dongkai."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Hai Dongkai, of Jiangnan's Thunderbolt Hall?"

Qiu Shuiqing nodded. "The explosive devices of the Thunderbolt Hall were hidden projectiles that were famous throughout the world. But after the appearance of the Peacock Plume, their prestige began to decline. Thus, Hai Dongkai organized people to come attack us, intending to destroy the Peacock Manor. Unfortunately, he died to the Peacock Plume before he even had a chance to strike."

A ray of light suddenly seemed to shoot out of Fu Hongxue's eyes. After repeating this to himself, he asked again, "He died to the Peacock Plume before he even had a chance to strike?"

Qiu Shuiqing nodded again. "Although this happened more than a century ago, the events were recorded in this ledger very clearly."

Mingyue Xin said, "I've heard of this elder before as well. I seem to recall that his nickname was something like the 'Thunderbolt Whip'?"

Fu Hongxue slowly nodded, then once more began to walk along the wall!

With his right hand, he gripped his sabre. With his left, he held the whip. Suddenly, he closed his eyes. Although the way in which he walked was very peculiar, his face seemed as calm and peaceful as that of an old monk.

Watching him, everybody held their breaths. The stone room became as quiet as a tomb.

Suddenly, there was a flash of a sabre.

This sabre flash was much brighter than any which Yan Nanfei had ever seen before.

With this slash, Fu Hongxue clearly used his internal energy. Although his eyes were firmly shut, this strike landed precisely on one of the cracks on one of the stone walls.

He didn't use his eyes to see. He used his heart!

As soon as his sabre struck out, it sank into the stone wall.

Fu Hongxue let out a long sigh as he pulled the blade of his sabre from the wall. Just as he finished sighing, he struck out with the chain whip in his left hand, forcefully inserting it into the opening his sabre made in the wall.

At this moment, there was a sudden booming sound. The chain whip exploded within the opening in the stone wall.

The stone wall which had been fashioned using six feet of solid rock exploded as well. Broken stones scattered all over the place, flying about like rain.

And then, everything was quiet once more. A large hole had been blown into the stone wall.

Fu Hongxue had already sheathed his sabre. He only said in a light voice, "The explosive weapons of Jiangnan's Thunderbolt Hall are really without peer."

Qiu Shuiqing, Mingyue Xin, and Yan Nanfei quietly gazed at him. Their eyes were filled with respect. "How did you know that this chain whip was filled with explosives?"

"I didn't know!" Fu Hongxue said. "I only felt that the whip seemed to weigh less than it should. Thus, the insides of it were probably hollow. As fortune would have it, I suddenly thought of Hai Dongkai."

Hai Dongkai's midnight assault on the Peacock Manor was one of the most famous war stories of the martial world.

Of the seventy two greatest battles the martial world had ever seen, at least seven occurred at the Peacock Manor!

And yet, the Peacock Manor almost miraculously continued to remain standing in good health. But as soon as they walked out, they discovered that the Peacock Manor which had braved fire and misfortune for so long had turned into a large pile of rubble. Its nine great courtyards, thirty six towers, and eighty square li of terrain had been turned into debris!

The fresh blood had not yet fully dried. And so, Qiu Shuiqing stood in the middle of blood-soaked rubble.

Eighty square li of land. Five hundred lives. Thirty generations of fame.  
They had all been destroyed!

It was as though an evil miracle had taken place!

Qiu Shuiqing neither moved, nor shed tears. This sort of hatred and enmity could no longer be washed away by tears.

The only thing he wanted to shed was blood!

But he could not find the person who had caused this disaster. The sky was gloomy and dark. The land all around them was barren and still. It seemed as though the four of them were the only living things in the world.

Yan Nanfei stood off to one side, far away. It seemed as though he were even more pained than Qiu Shuiqing.

Fu Hongxue had been staring at him for a long time. He coldly said, "You are blaming yourself and condemning yourself. You feel you brought this misfortune upon him?"

Yan Nanfei slowly nodded his head. Several times, he wanted to speak, but forbore. Contradictions wracked his heart, increasing his pain.

Finally, he was no longer able to resist. He suddenly said, "This is the third time!"

Fu Hongxue said, "The third time?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The first time was the Phoenix Assembly. The second time was the Ni Family Garden. This is the third time."

He spoke very quickly, because he had already decided to reveal all of the secrets.

"In this day and age, the person with the highest level of martial arts ability isn't you. It is Gongzi Yu." His words were very honest and frank. "Although your sabre has nearly reached the level of being all-conquering and unstoppable, you yourself still have weaknesses."

"How about you?" Fu Hongxue said.

"I practice the sword of the heart, the sword of the intention. When heart and mind come together, there is nothing one cannot do. Originally, this is a style which approaches the highest levels of swordsmanship. If I can master it, I will be invincible."

"You cannot master it?"

"It is as though mastery of this style is blocked by thirteen locks. I know I have all the keys to the locks, but after I open twelve of them, I cannot find the thirteenth."

Yan Nanfei forced a laugh. "Thus, whenever I execute my strikes, I feel as though my power does not come from the heart. Sometimes, when I send out an attack, it clearly is about to land on target, but when it actually reaches the target, it's actually off by an inch."

Fu Hongxue asked, "How about Gongzi Yu?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Not only is his martial arts all-conquering and unstoppable, it is invulnerable as well. In the entire world, there are perhaps only two things which can defeat him."

Fu Hongxue said, "One is the Peacock Plume?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The other is Sorrowful Book of Yin and Yang and of Heaven and Hell Mingling."

Within this book was recorded the seven most vile, vicious martial arts techniques in the history of the world. According to legends, when this book was written, the heavens wept blood, ghosts wailed at night, and after the author finished the very last word, he himself vomited blood and died.

Fu Hongxue naturally heard of this legend as well. "But as soon as this book was written, it disappeared. No one in the world has ever seen it!"

Yan Nanfei said, "This book definitely was lost a long time ago, but it just as definitely resurfaced recently!"

Fu Hongxue asked, "Where did it reappear?"

Yan Nanfei replied, "The Phoenix Market."

A year ago, when he went to the Phoenix Market, he went for the purpose of finding this book. Fu Hongxue happened to be there as well.

Yan Nanfei said, "At the time, I was certain that you must have gone there to find the book as well. I felt that it was very likely that you too had been bought and paid for by Gongzi Yu, which is why I attacked you."

But he had lost.

Although he wanted to kill Fu Hongxue, Fu Hongxue hadn't wanted to kill him. Thus, all of these tragic, mysterious, and dangerous events had occurred.

Yan Nanfei said, "After I battled you, my mind fell apart. It took me four hours before I was able to go to the Phoenix Market again."

But by then, the Phoenix Market had been turned into a ghost town. Without question, it had been sacked by the subordinates of Gongzi Yu!

Yan Nanfei said, "That morning, four of the Seven Heroes of the Ni Family had visited the Phoenix Market. They arrived and left in a hurry, and at first they didn't arouse anyone's attention. But I couldn't help but want to go talk with them and find out what was going on. I didn't imagine that as a consequence of my trip, their precious courtyard, which had been painstakingly maintained for over thirteen generations, would be turned into a barren wasteland.

After thinking for a moment longer, he added, "That was the day I first met Mingyue Xin. She hadn't been there for more than five days."

Fu Hongxue clenched both his fists tightly. After a long time passed, he finally said slowly, "Although to this very day you still have not actually seen the Sorrowful Book, who knows how many people have been destroyed due to it."

Yan Nanfei's fists were also tightly clenched. "Thus, I must kill Gongzi Yu and avenge the deaths of those murdered souls."

Fu Hongxue said, "Thus, he must kill you as well."

They stopped speaking, because at this time, Qiu Shuiqing slowly walked over towards them.

His face was still expressionless. Even his sharp, keen eyes had turned hollow and dull.

He stood in front of them for a long time, as though he were a man made from wood. Only then did he mumble, as though he were sleepwalking, "The members of the Qiu family are all dead now. But their corpses remain. Only one person is missing."

Fu Hongxue said, "Gongsun Tu?"

Qiu Shuiqing nodded. "It isn't an easy feat to totally eradicate every member of the Qiu family. They must have casualties of their own as well. However, they've taken them all away!"

Yan Nanfei couldn't resist saying, "These people have always been very neat and tidy in handling their affairs, not leaving behind any trace."

Fu Hongxue said, "But this many people couldn't have simply disappeared. No matter where they go, they'll have left some clues of their passing behind."

Qiu Shuiqing looked at him. In his eyes could be seen an expression of gratitude. He suddenly said, "My wife is often sick, so I have another woman in the city. By now, she is six month's pregnant. If she gives birth to a son, he will be the last descendant of the Qiu family."

He slowly added, "Her surname is Zhuo. Her name is Zhuo Yuzhen. Her father's name is Zhuo Donglai. He is a master of darts."

Fu Hongxue quietly listened to him. He paid very careful attention to every word.

Qiu Shuiqing let out a long breath. "I should attend to these matters personally, but I no longer am able to. If I bear more shame and cling to life, in the future, when I go to the netherworld, I will have no face left to meet the ancestors of the Qiu family."

Yan Nanfei shouted in a fierce voice, "You cannot die. Don't you want to get revenge?"

Qiu Shuiqing suddenly let out a laugh. His laughter was even more miserable than weeping. "Revenge? You want me to get revenge? Do you know what type of person Gongzi Yu is? Do you know how great his power is?"

Yan Nanfei naturally knew. No one knew better than him.

Aside from the Beggar's Clan and the Seven Great Sword Sects, which had been long established historical organizations, at least half of the thirty nine other most powerful organizations of the martial world had extremely close relationships with Gongzi Yu. At least eight or nine of them were secretly under the direct command of Gongzi Yu.

In addition, the number of first-class masters who had been bought and paid for by Gongzi Yu were innumerable. In addition, there were one or two masters amongst his bodyguards who possessed a level of martial arts that was unfathomably deep.

Yan Nanfei was about to reveal everything he knew about Gongzi Yu, but Qiu Shuiqing was no longer interested in listening!

Qiu Shuiqing still stood there unmoving, but suddenly, fresh blood began to spurt from his ears, his eyes, his nostrils, and his mouth.

Just as he fell down, from far away the sound of a rooster crowing could be heard.

The Peacock Manor was surrounded on two sides by mountains and a third by water. The mountains were very steep. There was no one that injured people could be brought across them. The river water moved at a torrential pace. Even rafts covered by sheepskin could not pass it.

The Peacock Manor had been guarded tightly, and did not lack for experts. To totally eradicate everyone in the manor would have required at least thirty or fifty first class masters.

Even if the invaders had come by water or through the mountain passes, there was only one way they could have left!



In front of the manor was a thick forest. There was a wide, paved road by it, but not a single wheel track or hoofprint could be seen, nor was there any blood or footprints.

Mingyue Xin gritted her teeth. "No matter what, we must find a third person today."

Fu Hongxue said, "Aside from Zhuo Yuzhen and Gongsun Tu, who else is there?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Peacock. I've already subdued him and sent him back undercover. I'm sure he can provide us with some clues."

Yan Nanfei coldly said, "Unfortunately, every clue he gives us is possibly a trap."

Mingyue Xin said, "A trap?"

Yan Nanfei said, "He fears you, but I guarantee that he fears Gongzi Yu more. If he didn't leak out secrets out to Gongzi Yu, how could Gongzi Yu have come to the Peacock Manor at such a perfect time?"

Mingyue Xin said with hatred, "If your guess is correct, all the more reason for me to hunt him down."

Fu Hongxue said, "But the first person we must find is not him. It is Zhuo Yuzhen."

None of them knew Zhuo Yuzhen, but Zhuo Donglai was a famous person. He was a famous alcoholic.

He was already drunk when they found him. He lay drunk beneath the shade of a tree in his courtyard. However, as soon as he heard Qiu Shuiqing's name, he jumped to his feet and cursed, "That old bastard! I treated him as a friend, but he went around behind my back and tricked my daughter into falling for him."

They didn't try to shut him up. The more angrily he cursed, the more he proved that the affair was real. As long as they could preserve this last bit of flesh and blood of Qiu Shuiqing's family, it didn't matter how much Zhuo Donglai cursed.

His daughter, however, couldn't take any more. All of his cursing had caused her to be driven away. On top of her boudoir in her room, she had left a letter. A young girl with long pigtails was bent over the dressing table, weeping nonstop.

On the letter was written, "Your daughter was unfilial, and has disgraced your home. Because of this piece of flesh growing inside of me, I cannot kill myself to redeem the shame..."

The young girl said, "So the young miss left. I couldn't stop her."

"You don't know where she went?"

"If I knew, I would have gone as well. Why would I stay here?"

If there was a drunken demon in the house, no one would want to stay. And so they left as well!

However, they still needed to find Zhuo Yuzhen. How were they supposed to find her within the sea of people?

Mingyue Xin suddenly said, "There's a place where I'm sure we'll find her."

Yan Nanfei immediately said, "What place?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Since he didn't want her father to know about their affair, Qiu Shuiqing certainly must have prepared a secret place for the two of them to have their trysts."

Even the boss of the small drapery shop outside could find a lovers meeting place for his mistress, much less the master of the Peacock Manor.

Unfortunately, that place must be extremely well hidden. "Qiu Shuiqing has always been a very prudent, circumspect person. Aside from himself, who might know about this?"

"There's one person who must know!"

"Who?"

“That little girl with long pigtails.” Mingyue Xin’s spoke with great certainty. “The relationship and affection between a young miss and her personal serving girl can be very close, almost like that between sisters. If I did something like this, there’s no way I could hide it from Xingxing!”

Xingxing was the name of her own personal serving girl.

“That little girl had a sly, clever look about her. She was just putting on an act for us earlier. Within the hour, she’ll go out to look for her.”

Mingyue Xin wasn’t wrong.

Before an hour had passed, the little girl secretly snuck out from the back door and crept down a side alley.

Mingyue Xin secretly watched her, while Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei watched Mingyue Xin.

“It’s never easy for an unmarried maiden to travel around by herself, so their trysting place can’t be too far away!”

Mingyue Xin was right once again. The place was only two alleys away, with high walls and a narrow doorway. It was a quiet and secluded courtyard, with a ginkgo tree growing in the middle and around ten or so Chinese roses growing on top of the wall.

The door wasn’t latched; evidently, the little girl was expected. The little girl glanced all around, then quietly pushed the door open, entered, then closed and locked the door.

A delicate fragrance floated down from the Chinese roses on the top of the wall, and the leaves of the ginkgo tree were blown to and fro by the wind. No human voices could be heard at all within the courtyard.

“Go inside first. We’ll wait for you outside!”

Mingyue Xin knew all along that the two men would not be willing to rashly charge into a young girl’s private bedroom. This is because they were real men, men amongst men.

They watched as she jumped over the wall. They waited for a long time. The roses still smelled just as sweet, but from within the yard could be heard a cry of alarm.

It was Mingyue Xin's voice.

Mingyue Xin definitely wasn't the type of woman who would be easily frightened.

The leaves of the ginkgo tree were so thick, they cast a shadow into the room, the insides of which were as dark as dusk. The body of the serving girl was bent over on the table. Her dark, oily pigtail had been wrapped around her throat. Her hands and her feet were as cold as ice.

Mingyue Xin's hands and feet were cold as well. "We came just a little too late."

The little girl had been choked to death. Zhuo Yuzhen was nowhere to be seen.

No one would choke themselves to death with their own pigtail. Who was the killer?

Yan Nanfei clenched his fists. "It seems as though the affair between Zhuo Yuzhen and Qiu Shuiqing isn't something which was kept totally secret after all."

Thus, Gongzi Yu's subordinates arrived one step ahead of them!

Fu Hongxue's face was pale white, but a hint of red could be seen in his eyes.

He was searching. He hoped that the murderer, in his haste, might have left some clues behind this time.

Just one act of negligence. Just a single clue. If it was there, Fu Hongxue would not miss it!

This time, he almost missed it, simply because this clue was too obvious.

There was a small mirror on top of the dressing stand. Someone had written three words on the mirror with rouge. The words were written very hastily and sloppily. Clearly, they had been left behind by Zhuo Yuzhen. In his haste, the man who had kidnapped her didn't notice.

Why is it that the most obvious things are the things people pay the least attention to?

Blood red rouge. Blood red words. "Zi Yang Temple!"

Ziyang Temple was a very ordinary name. There were many Daoist temples named Ziyang Temple. But as luck would have it, there was only a single temple in this city by that name.

"How did she know they would take her to the Ziyang Temple?"

"Perhaps she overheard it. Perhaps her kidnappers numbered amongst them a priest of Ziyang Temple. She was born and raised here. Naturally, she'd recognize them."

Either way, they would have to go and check it out. Even if this was a trap, they still had to go.

Unexpectedly, the courtyard of the Ziyang Temple was also covered by a vibrantly growing ginkgo tree. Incense smoke curled around about the main hall. Not a single person could be seen. But as soon as they entered the backyard, they could hear voices.

What a cold, desolate courtyard. What a cold, icy voice. It only said two words. "Please enter!"

The voice came from a guestroom towards the left. It seemed as though the people inside were waiting for them all along.

It seemed as though this was a trap after all. But when were these three ever afraid of others' traps?

Without even thinking, Fu Hongxue walked over. The door was left unlocked. With a light push, he opened it.

There were four people within the room.

As long as he decided to do something, and as long as his sabre was in his hand, even if there were thousands of soldiers in front of him, Fu Hongxue wouldn't shrink back in the slightest. Much less just four people!

One of the four was drinking wine. Two were playing chess. The fourth was a young man in white who was using a small knife to trim his nails.

No lamps were lit in the room. The young man's face looked just like the blade of his knife; white with black showing through. So black, it was frightening.

Of the two playing chess, one was indeed a Daoist priest. His beard and his hair were all white, but his face was as red and ruddy as a baby's. The other player wore black clothes and white socks. He was dressed simply, with only a ring on his finger. But the ring was made out of priceless Han jade, the value of which was enough to purchase several cities.

Fu Hongxue's pupils suddenly contracted. His ashen pale face suddenly became flushed with a red color.

This was because the person who had been drinking with his head lowered, had begun to slowly lift up his face.

After she saw this person's face, Mingyue Xin's hands and feet turned ice cold again.

His face was criss-crossed with scars and wounds. His eyes were as keen as an eagle's. It was the 'Immortal Eagle of Heaven', Gongsun Tu!

He was watching them as well, and within his keen gaze there was a hint of cruel mockery. "Please sit."

There really were three empty seats in the guest room, and Fu Hongxue actually sat down.

It was always good to conserve a little bit of energy just before a vicious life-and-death battle was about to break out.

Yan Nanfei and Mingyue Xin both sat down as well. They too knew that the time had come for a battle where life and death would be determined in the blink of an eye.

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## Chapter 9 – Betting One's Life on a Single Sabre

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The sound of the apricot tree in the courtyard gently rustling in the wind could be heard. The sound of chess pieces being placed on the chessboard were gentle and tasteful, as though they were a musical instrument. There was no expression at all on the face of the young man in white who was trimming his nails. The two who were playing chess didn't even bother to raise their heads.

Mingyue Xin couldn't keep herself from saying, "We didn't come here to watch you play chess."

Gongsun Tu said, "I know you have come here to find me. I am the one who bathed the Peacock Manor in blood. You didn't find the wrong person."

Mingyue Xin's hands clenched into fists, her fingernails piercing into her flesh. "And the other three?"

Gongsun Tu didn't directly answer. Instead, he first introduced the young man in white.

"This is the son of Luoyang's Xiao family, Xiao Siwu [Si Wu means 'four withouts']." He explained, "The 'four withouts' means this. His flying dagger skill is without equal, he has killed people without number, and when angered, without mercy."

"The fourth without?"

"Even when he isn't angered, he's still without mercy." Gongsun Tan continued, "He also has another nickname, a very long and strange one. 'He'll go to heaven or hell to seek out Little Li, and whole heartedly wishes to kill Ye Kai'."

In former years, Little Li's flying dagger overawed the world. Once his flying dagger was sent out, it would never miss! His glorious, magnificent fame had not yet been matched to this very day by any.

Ye Kai received tutelage from him, and gained the essence of his flying dagger. He roamed the martial world for thirty carefree years, and although he didn't kill a single person without good reason, no one dared to offend him.

Mingyue Xin said, "Not only is this merciless young man certain that he can kill Ye Kai, he also wants to seek out Li Tanhua and compete in martial arts against him?"

Gongsun Tu said, "That seems to be so."

Mingyue Xin laughed. "He seems to be very arrogant."

Gongsun Tu said, "Very arrogant people tend to have the ability to back up their arrogance."

Mingyue Xin said, "That seems to be so."

Gongsun Tan smiled. "But actually, it isn't?"

Mingyue Xin laughed. "The more arrogant one is, the less actual ability one has. There are many people in the martial world who are like that."

Gongsun Tan's smile was meant to sow discord, but her laughter was nothing short of a direct challenge. These words of hers clearly were meant for Xiao Siwu to hear.

But it seemed as though this haughty young man hadn't even heard her words. His features remained totally emotionless. The dagger in his hand moved very slowly, and every single motion was extremely careful, as though he were very much afraid that he might cut his hand.

His hand was very steady, and his fingers were long and very strong.

Fu Hongxue never paid attention to people's hands, but he now paid attention to this person's. He observed every single movement very carefully.

Trimming one's fingernails isn't really all that exciting. It's not worth watching.



However, Xiao Siwu seemed to become very uncomfortable underneath Fu Hongxue's stare. He suddenly said in a cold voice, "Watching a person trim his fingernails isn't as good as watching people play chess."

Gongsun Tu laughed. "Especially since these two chess players are grandmasters of our time."

Mingyue Xin blinked a few times. "This Daoist priest would be the boss of the Ziguan Temple?"

It seemed as though Gongsun Tan once more wanted to cause trouble. He intentionally asked, "What boss does the Ziguan Temple have?"

Mingyue Xin laughed. "In a Daoist temple, the head Daoist priest would be the boss. In a \*\*\*\*\*house, the madame would be the boss. 'Boss' is a title that can be applied to all sorts of people."

The white haired man picked up a chess piece, then suddenly turned his head and smiled towards her. "That's right. I'm the boss of this place."

Mingyue Xin sweetly said, "How has business been recently?"

The white haired man said, "Passable. No matter what time it is, there's always some stupid husband or stupid wife who comes here offering incense or fragrant oils. And of course, during beautiful spring and autumn days, business is very brisk."

When he spoke, he really sounded as though he were a boss.

Laughing, Mingyue Xin became even more cheerful. "Bosses are usually very boring people. I didn't expect you to be such an interesting boss."

The white haired man said, "I'm the sort of man who abstains from nothing at all."

He also smiled very cheerfully, but Mingyue Xin's laughter suddenly seemed very forced. "Abstains from nothing at all? Boss, what is your surname?"

The white haired man said, "My surname is Yang."

Mingyue Xin said, "Yang Wuji?"

The white haired man said, "That seems to be so."

Mingyue Xin was no longer able to laugh.

She knew of this person. Thirty years ago, he shared an equal amount of fame with the sect leader of Wudang, the Daoist priest Bashan. He was known as one of the 'Seven Great Swordsmen of the Outer Regions'.

She also knew that there were four lines in a poem which described him. The first line was 'Abstains from nothing at all', and so was the fourth.

Very few people knew these four lines.

'Abstains from nothing at all, as soon as he laughs he kills, if he intends to kill someone, he abstains from nothing at all.'

Supposedly, if this Daoist were to treat you very coldly, that means he considers you a friend. But if he were to laugh at you and treat you very kindly, there usually is only one reason for that: He will kill you!

In addition, it was said that after he had decided to kill you, he would abstain from nothing at all and would kill you regardless of the relationship you had with him. In addition, no matter where one went, he would hunt you down and kill you.

Just now, he laughed with her, and in fact he was still laughing. When was he planning to make his move?

Mingyue Xin stared at him, not daring to look away for a second.

Unexpectedly, Yang Wuji turned his head around again. With a light clinging sound, he placed the chess piece in his hand on the board.

After playing that chess piece, he swept all the pieces on the board off. With a sigh, he said, "You truly are a grandmaster. I admit defeat."

The middle aged man in black clothes with white socks said, "That wrong move is wholly due to the fact that you were distracted by others. How can it count as a defeat?"

Yang Wuji said, "A single wrong move can cause total disaster. How can it not count as a defeat? In addition, playing chess is like swordsmanship. One should be totally focused and not allow one's self to be distracted. If one can be distracted by others, how can he be considered an expert?"

Gongsun Tu laughed, "Fortunately, although it is easy for you to be distracted while playing chess, you are never distracted while wielding your sword."

Yang Wuji lightly said, "Fortunately, that is the case. That's the only reason why I've been able to stay alive up till now."

The middle aged man in black clothes with white clothes sighed. "Unfortunately, although I am never distracted while playing chess, when I begin competing in swords with others, my mind becomes as muddled and chaotic as the spring grass."

Mingyue Xin said, "Your surname, sir?"

The man in black said, "I can't say, I can't say."

Mingyue Xin asked, "Why can't you say?"

The man in black said, "Because I'm a nameless, ordinary fellow. The only thing I am good at is chess."

Mingyue Xin asked, "You are a chess prodigy? Whose chess prodigy?"

Yan Nanfei suddenly chuckled. "Naturally, he is Gongzi's chess prodigy."

The man in black seemed to just notice him. He immediately chuckled, then cupped his hands and said, "Oh, so it's young master Yan."

Yan Nanfei said, "Unfortunately, I'm not your young master."

The man in black smiled. "Young master, do you play chess?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I barely have the time to flee for my life these days. How could I have the energy to play chess?"

The man in black laughed. "I, on the other hand, would be willing to lose my life for the sake of playing chess. Why worry about running for my life?"

Yan Nanfei laughed loudly, and the man in black smiled as well. Evidently, the two of them were already acquainted.

With a chess prodigy like this, what type of person might his young master be?

Yan Nanfei asked again, "Does your young master play any chess?"

The man in black said, "He does not."

Yan Nanfei smiled. "I imagine it isn't because he is too busy fleeing for his life. It's because he's too busy taking the lives of others."

The man in black laughed loudly, and Yan Nanfei smiled. Was the person they were speaking of Gongzi Yu?

Yan Nanfei and Gongzi Yu used to be friends?

The man in black cupped his hands again. "Young master, rest here for a bit longer. I must bid you farewell."

Yan Nanfei asked, "Why don't you sit for a while longer as well?"

The man in black said, "I came to play chess. Now that there's no chess game going on, why should I stay?"

Yan Nanfei said, "In order to kill people!"

The man in black said, "Kill people? Who wants to kill people?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Me!"

His face suddenly sank, and he turned to stare coldly at Gongsun Tu. "The person I want to kill is you."

Gongsun Tu didn't seem surprised at all. He let out a sigh, then said, "Why do you want to kill me?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Because you have killed far too many people."

Gongsun Tu lightly said, "And there are quite a few people who want to kill me. But I am still alive."

Yan Nanfei replied, "You've lived for far too long. I'm afraid that today will be the day you must die."

Gongsun Tu said leisurely, "Today is a day of dying. I just don't know who will be the one to die!"

Yan Nanfei laughed coldly. At that very moment, he drew forth his sword from beneath his clothes, the Rose Sword!

This soft sword could actually be stuck around one's waist normally, as though it were a belt. The soft leather scabbard was dyed red using some unknown material, so red that it looked like a spring rose in full bloom.

When he saw this sword, Gongsun Tu couldn't help but reveal a look of respect in his eyes. "I recognize this sword. It was refined a hundred times and smelted a thousand times over. It is soft, yet unyielding. It really is a rare, incredible tool!"

Yan Nanfei said, "I also know about your hook. Where is your hook?"

Gongsun Tu laughed. "When did you ever see a person using a hook to pick flowers?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Pick flowers?"

Gongsun Tu said, "Isn't a rose a flower?"

The man in black suddenly said, "If you want to pick a rose, you had best remember that roses have thorns. The thorns can do more than just prick one's hand; they can also prick one's heart."

Gongsun Tu said, "I have no heart to be pricked."

The man in black said, "But you have a hand which can be hurt."

Gongsun Tu laughed again, then said without a care, "If he pricks my hand, I shall prick his heart."

The man in black said, "What will you use to prick his heart?"

Gongsun Tu said, "A person."

The man in black asked, "Who?"

Gongsun Tu said, "Zhuo Yuzhen."

The man in black asked, "So if he hurts you, you will kill Zhuo Yuzhen?"

Gongsun Tu nodded. "Zhuo Yuzhen cannot die, and therefore I cannot die either. The only one who can die is him!"

The man in black said, "So you have placed yourself in an invincible position for this battle?"

Gongsun Tu said, "That was the case all along."

Smiling, he looked at Yan Nanfei. "So by now, you should have realized who will be the person to die today."

Yan Nanfei said, "You!"

He coldly continued, "Only a dead person can be guaranteed to not kill others. I intend to make sure that Zhuo Yuzhen stays alive, but even more do I intend to make sure that you die."

Gongsun Tu let out a sigh. "It seems you still don't understand, since you didn't hear the words I said earlier."

The man in black said, "But I heard them."

Gongsun Tu said, "What did I say?"

The man in black said, "You said that as soon as you see blood, immediately kill Zhuo Yuzhen."

Gongsun Tu said, "Who did I say that to?"

The man in black said, "I don't recognize that person. All I know is that you called him 'forefinger'."

Gongsun Tu said, "Where is he right now?"

The man in black said, "He took Zhuo Yuzhen with him and left."

Gongsun Tu said, "Where did he go?"

The man in black said, "I don't know!"

Gongsun Tu said, "Who knows?"

The man in black said, "It seems nobody knows!"

Gongsun Tu said, "No one knows to begin with!"

Smiling, he looked at Yan Nanfei. "Do you fully understand now?"

Yan Nanfei nodded, but still did not bat an eyelid.

Gongsun Tu said, "So whose death day shall today be?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Yours!"

Gongsun Tu shook his head, smiling wryly. "It seems that not only is this fellow very stubborn, he's also very stupid. Even now, he doesn't understand."

Yan Nanfei said, "The one who doesn't understand is you, because despite all of your calculations, there is something you have forgotten."

Gongsun Tu said, "Oh?"

Yan Nanfei said, "You forgot that I cannot die and do not want to die. What's more, if I die, I still won't be able to save Zhuo Yuzhen. Why would I let you kill me? Why wouldn't I kill you?"

Gongsun Tu was startled. "Since nobody can die, what do you propose?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Pull out your hook and give my sword a try. If I cannot defeat you within ten stances, I will give you a person's life!"

Gongsun Tu said, "Whose life?"

Yan Nanfei said, "My life."

Gongsun Tu said, "And if you defeat me, I must give you a life as well?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Naturally."

Gongsun Tu said, "Whose life do you want? Zhuo Yuzhen's?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I want to see you respectfully presenting her to me."

Gongsun Tu mumbled to himself for a while, then asked the man in black, "Did Yan Nanfei personally say those words just then?"

The man in black said, "He did."

Gongsun Tu asked, "Is Yan Nanfei the type of person who keeps his word?"

The man in black said, "His promise is worth its weight in gold. Even if he dies, he won't go back on it!"

Gongsun Tu suddenly began to laugh again. He loudly laughed, "Actually, everything I have said up till now was to get you to make that promise."

By the time his laughter ended, his hook appeared in his hand.

A hook as bright as snow. Eyes as keen as an eagle's. A smile as cruel as a hawk's. Although his weapon was very heavy, its transformations were light and complicated.

Gongsun Tu smiled. "Do you know what's the good thing about this hook?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Go ahead and tell me."

Gongsun Tu lightly stroked the tip of the hook. "Although this hook is very heavy, in a small room, it can be used freely. How about your sword?"



Yan Nanfei said, "If you can force me out of this room, you can consider me as having lost."

Gongsun Tu laughed loudly. "Great. Why haven't you drawn your sword yet?"

Yan Nanfei said, "There's no need for me to draw my sword."

Gongsun Tu said, "No need?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Even a sheathed sword can still kill. Why should I draw it out? After I pull it out, perhaps it'll become unable to kill."

Gongsun Tu said, "Why is that?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Because the ingenuity of this sword lies not in the tip but in the scabbard."

Gongsun Tu did not understand. "Can it be that the scabbard of the sword is even sharper than its point?"

Yan Nanfei gently stroked the bright red scabbard. "Do you know what was used to dye the scabbard red?"

Gongsun Tu did not know.

Yan Nanfei said, "The juice of the 'Blood Rose'."

Gongsun Tu clearly did not know what a 'Blood Rose' was. He had never heard of it.

Yan Nanfei said, "The 'Blood Rose' is a rose that has been irrigated using five different types of poisoned blood."

Gongsun Tu said, "Five types of poisoned blood? What five?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The seven-inch serpent, the hundred-sectioned centipede, the thousand-year old cold snake, and the blazing red poisonous scorpion."

Gongsun Tu said, "And the last one?"

Yan Nanfei coldly said, "The last one is the blood of unfilial, unjust traitors and villains!"

Gongsun Tu was unable to laugh this time.

Yan Nanfei said, "The creatures which the Rose Sword kills are these five types. If it meets a filial son, a loyal official, or an honorable man, then there is no way for the power of the sword to be released."

Gongsun Tu sneered, "The power of the scabbard?"

Yan Nanfei didn't deny it. "If it meets with the five poisons, the flower soul of the Rose Sword come to life."

Staring at Gongsun Tu, he said, "If you are one of the five poisons, at this moment you will smell a strange, mystical fragrance. The flower soul of the Rose Sword will be silently draining away your soul."

Gongsun Tu laughed loudly. As he laughed, every single scar on his face writhed and contorted, as though they were poisonous snakes.

Yan Nanfei said, "You don't believe me?"

Gongsun Tu said, "Your sword might have a flower soul, but my hook has a soul as well."

Yan Nanfei said, "What is it?"

Gongsun Tu said, "The soul of wrongfully killed ghosts!"

His laughter sounded ferocious, and his features were terrible to behold. "I don't know how many lives have been lost to this hook and have been trapped in it. All of them are waiting for me to find a replacement fall guy for them, so that they might escape and reincarnate."

Yan Nanfei said, "I believe it. I can also believe that the person they want to find the most is you."

Gongsun Tu said, "Why haven't you made your move yet?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I already have!"

The smile on Gongsun Tu's face disappeared. It was as though all the poisonous serpents writhing on his face had suddenly been frozen.

Yan Nanfei's sword really had started to move. It was moving very slowly, carrying with it a very strange rhythm. It was as though the petals of a rose were slowly blooming in the spring wind. There wasn't a hint of any force which could be used to take someone's life.

Gongsun Tu sneered, and struck out with his hook. His strike was fast and accurate. His many years worth of life and death experiences had caused him to discard the usage of flowery, pretty-to-behold techniques. Every single attack of his was definitely effective.

But his attack was somehow drawn into that strange, bizarre rhythm of the Rose Sword, as though a sharp shell was drawn into the waves of the ocean.

When the tides retreated, all of his attacking force was dissipated with it.

And then, he smelled a strange, mysterious fragrance. Everything in front of him turned a scarlet red color, and aside from this bright red, he couldn't see anything else. It was as though a red curtain had suddenly been draped in front of his eyes.

His heart trembled. He wanted to use the hook in his hand to brush aside this red curtain, to pierce through it, but his reflexes had slowed down and his movements had become sluggish. By the time the bright red curtain disappeared, the Rose Sword was already resting on his throat.

He suddenly felt his throat go dry, and his mouth was filled with a bitter, astringent taste. In addition, he felt exhausted. So exhausted that he could vomit.

With a dinging sound, his hook fell to the floor.

Yang Wuji let out a long sigh. Clearly, he too had felt that mysterious power which had radiated from the sword earlier.

He had practiced the sword for more than forty years, but he actually couldn't tell what type of technique Yan Nanfei had used.

The man in black also let out a breath. He slowly said, "This is the sword of the heart? Can it be a flower soul really exists in that sword?"

Yan Nanfei said, "It hasn't come to life yet; it just briefly woke up."

The expression on the face of man in black's changed. "What if it really did come to life?"

A solemn look was on Yan Nanfei's face. He slowly said, "If the flower soul were to come to life, then a long cherished dream of mine would have been achieved. I would die without any regrets."

The man in black said, "When the flower soul comes to life, must someone die?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Beyond a doubt, someone would die."

The man in black said, "What type of person would die?"

Yan Nanfei said, "At least two people. One person is myself. The other is..."

He didn't finish, and the man in black didn't push him to continue.

On both men's faces suddenly appeared very strange expressions. Suddenly, both of them laughed.

Yan Nanfei's laughter was more joyful.

## TWO

The Rose Sword continued to rest on Gongsu Tu's throat. He knew that he would soon be able to see Zhuo Yuzhen.

"Harness a horse to a carriage. First have Miss Zhuo escorted into the cart, then escort us out."

Gongsun Tu totally acceded to his demands.

Smiling, Mingyue Xin rose to her feet. She couldn't help but feel relieved as well. This time, at least, they weren't defeated.

Xiao Siwu was still trimming his fingernails. His hand remained just as steady as before, but his cold eyes revealed a hint of impatience and anxiety.

This was because Fu Hongxue was still staring at him. Even when Yan Nanfei made his strike, Fu Hongxue's gaze hadn't flickered in the slightest.

It seemed as though aside from this young man's hands, there was nothing else in the world worth Fu Hongxue paying attention to.

Faint blue veins were gradually revealing themselves on the back of Xiao Siwu's hands. It seemed as though he were using a great deal of strength to keep his hands so steady.

His movements were still very meticulous, and even his posture hadn't changed. This really was not easy to do at all.

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "Your hands are very stable."

Xiao Siwu lightly said, "They always have been stable."

Fu Hongxue said, "When you make your move, you are very quick. In addition, even after the dagger leaves your hand, the dagger itself continues to hold variations."

Xiao Siwu said, "You can tell?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "I can tell that you throw your dagger using three fingers, which is why you are able to impart a circular force to your dagger. I can also tell that you throw your dagger using your left hand. First you throw the dagger, and then you aim at the target."

Xiao Siwu said, "How can you tell?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Your thumb, index finger, and middle finger on your left hand are exceptionally strong."

Xiao Siwu forced a smile to his face. "Good eyesight."

Fu Hongxue said, "Good dagger!"

Xiao Siwu arrogantly said, "Of course it is."

Fu Hongxue said, "Although it is a good dagger, it still cannot compare to Ye Kai's."

Xiao Siwu's movements came to a halt.

Fu Hongxue finally stood up as well. "After Ye Kai's flying dagger leaves his hand, there is perhaps only a single person in this day and age who can defeat it."

The blue veins on the back of Xiao Siwu's hand bulged. "And my dagger?"

Fu Hongxue dully said, "At the very least, there are three people in this room alone who can defeat your dagger!"

Xiao Siwu said, "Are you one of the three?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Naturally."

He slowly turned around. Without even bothering to look back, he walked out.

Xiao Siwu watched him leave. Unexpectedly, he did not move, and did not say another word.

His knife was present! So were his hands! But his dagger would never leave his hands that easily!

He looked at the footprints on the ground and smiled coldly.

The footprints were very deep. Fu Hongxue had left them behind. When he had walked out of this door, he had already concentrated the force of his entire body.

Because only by concentrating all of the force of his body could he defend against Xiao Siwu's dagger.

But Xiao Siwu's dagger did not leave his hand.

Fu Hongxue walked outside. Raising his head towards the sky, he let out a long sigh. It seemed as though he felt disappointed.

Not only was he disappointed. He was worried.

He suddenly realized that youngster was more terrifying than any of the people he had met over the past few years.

He had already seen through the dagger style of the youngster, and wanted to provoke him into striking.

If the youngster were to strike now, Fu Hongxue would be able to handle it. He was certain of it.

Unexpectedly, this youngster was even colder and more fearful than the dagger in his hands.

“Three years later, if he throws his dagger at me, will I still be able to handle it?”

The neighing of horses could be heard in front of him. The courtyard was still very peaceful and secluded. Fu Hongxue was gripped by a sudden impulse to go back and kill that youngster, but he did not turn back.

He slowly walked out of the courtyard.

Gongsun Tu and Yan Nanfei were walking in front of him.

The Rose Sword was still resting on his throat. Yan Nanfei was facing Gongsun Tu, and slowly walking backwards step by step.

Gongsun Tu was unwilling to face him. He had already closed his eyes. It was as though Yan Nanfei was using a bamboo cane to beat a blind man.

But this blind man really was too dangerous. He couldn't slacken off in the slightest.

Mingyue Xin was the last to leave the guest room. She was just about to hasten her steps and catch up to Fu Hongxue.

At this moment, Yang Wuji appeared by her side. He said, “Do you know what is behind that wall?”

Mingyue Xin shook her head.

Yang Wuji grinned at her. "You'll find out soon."

Watching him smile, Mingyue Xin's hands were covered with cold sweat.

Yang Wuji took two steps back. Smiling, he nodded. Just at this moment, nine people appeared from behind the short wall.

The nine of them wielded thirteen different hidden projectiles. Each type contained at least three projectiles. The sound of bowstrings and springs being released sounded together in unison, as thirty flashing points of light streaked towards her like raindrops in a torrential storm.

Mingyue Xin's reaction speed wasn't slow. As soon as the sounds were heard, she immediately used her skills to try and dodge.

A flash of sabre light flew towards her, sweeping away most of the projectiles for her.

She had already moved her body, retreating to the left. None of the remaining projectiles were able to land on her.

Just as she was about to let out a sigh of relief, a sword suddenly pierced into the left side of her chest. She barely felt the pain at all.

The edge of the sword was cold and sharp. She only felt a sudden chill, and saw that a strange expression had appeared on Fu Hongxue's pale face. He suddenly stretched out his hand and pulled her towards him.

And then, she fell into Fu Hongxue's bosom.

Yang Wuji used an ancient, soft-lined sword. His sword had left the scabbard, and was still dripping with fresh blood.

As he stared at the fresh blood on his sword, his face suddenly became totally emotionless.

His attack was sure to land!

He had calculated from the very beginning that Fu Hongxue would pull out his sabre, and had calculated where Mingyue Xin would dodge to.



His sword was there, waiting for her.

Everything which had happened was within his calculations. He had already calculated that this attack of his was sure to land!

The nine men had disappeared. Fu Hongxue did not pursue them. He only coldly stared at Yang Wuji.

Yan Nanfei also came to a stop. The hand he was wielding his sword with seemed to tremble.

Yang Wuji suddenly said, "You had best be careful not to hurt him. If he dies, so does Zhuo Yuzhen."

Yan Nanfei gritted his teeth. "You are a famous swordsman with a lofty reputation, and this is your very own monastery. Yet you would actually use this sort of despicable method to plot against a lady? What type of creature are you?"

Yang Wuji lightly said, "I am Yang Wuji, and I am going to kill her!"

From far away, the man in black was standing in the middle of the guest room's doorway. He sighed. "If he intends to kill someone, he abstains from nothing at all. Yang Wuji really is Yang Wuji."

Yang Wuji said, "If I don't kill her right now, I'll have missed a golden opportunity. In the future, I'm afraid I won't have a second chance."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. With one hand, he clenched his sabre. With the other, he held the fainted Mingyue Xin to him.

He could feel that Mingyue Xin's body was slowly growing cold.

Yang Wuji said, "Do you intend to take revenge for her?"

Fu Hongxue didn't say another word. He was already beginning to walk backwards.

Yan Nanfei looked at Mingyue Xin, held in Fu Hongxue's embrace. Then he looked at Gongsun Tu, who was still pinned by his sword.

Gongsun Tu's eyes were still closed. His scarred face looked like a mask.

Yan Nanfei suddenly began to walk backwards as well.

Yang Wuji wasn't surprised at all. He lightly said, "The carriage has been prepared. Zhuo Yuzhen is waiting for you in the carriage. I wish you a pleasant trip."

Yan Nanfei couldn't resist saying, "Aren't you afraid that I'm going to kill Gongsun Tu after I get on the carriage?"

Yang Wuji said, "Why should I be afraid? What does his life and death have to do with me?"

He suddenly turned around and went back to the guest room. Arriving at the doorway, he tugged on the man in black's sleeves. "Let's go play some chess."

The man in black immediately nodded. Smiling, he said, "My purpose in coming was to play chess, after all."

### THREE

The horse carriage really had been prepared. A young maiden, six months pregnant or so, was sitting in a corner of the carriage, crying.

Fu Hongxue brought Mingyue Xin into the carriage, but the Rose Sword remained on Gongsun Tu's throat.

Yan Nanfei said in a ferocious voice, "Open your eyes and look at me!"

Gongsun Tu immediately opened his eyes.

Yan Nanfei glared at him with hate-filled eyes. "I really wanted to kill you."

Gongsun Tu said, "But you won't, because you are Yan Nanfei, whose word is as good as gold."

Yan Nanfei glared hatefully at him for a long time. Suddenly, he kicked Gongsun Tu in the stomach.

Gongsun Tu's body immediately crumpled inwards, as though he were a shrimp. Tears, snivel, and cold sweat began to flow.

Yan Nanfei didn't even spare him a single glance. Turning around, he said to the carriage driver, "Whip the horse and go. Don't stop for even a moment. If you want to try any tricks, do remember that my sword is at your back."

The carriage was very large, and the seats were very soft. The carriage driver was very skilled.

This was a carriage which people should be very happy to ride in. But there wasn't a single happy person in the carriage.

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "I should have killed Xiao Siwu."

Yan Nanfei said, "You didn't move against him."

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I had some misgivings, therefore..."

Yan Nanfei said, "Therefore, you were too slow."

Fu Hongxue slowly nodded. "If you intend to kill someone, abstain from nothing at all. When a golden opportunity is missed, it won't come again."

He spoke very slowly, as though he had already carefully pondered every single word.

Yan Nanfei was silent for a long time, before he let out a sigh. "I'm afraid I won't have many more chances to kill Gongsun Tu either."

Fu Hongxue said, "Fortunately, Mingyue Xin is not dead yet. Miss Zhuo is also safe and sound."

Zhuo Yuzhen, who was seated in a corner, was no longer crying. She looked at him, then suddenly said, "You are Fu Hongxue?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I've never met you, but I often heard Qiu...big brother Qiu talk about you. He often said that you were the only friend who could be trusted. He also said..."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Said what?"

Downcast, she said, "He told me time and time again that if something happened to me where he wasn't able to help me out, I was to seek you out. That's why he carefully described you to me and had me memorize your features."

She lowered her head. Tears falling, she said, "I never imagined that I would still be alive, but he would already..."

At this point, her sobs overwhelmed her voice. Bowing down in her seat, she began to bawl loudly.

She was a beautiful girl. Her beauty was of the delicate and weak type, which easily lent itself to making others empathize with her.

Although Mingyue Xin was smart and tough, if it weren't for the fact that Fu Hongxue had staunched the flow of blood in time, she would have died by now.

Gazing at them, Yan Nanfei couldn't help but let out a light sigh. "No matter what, at least we have now done right by manor-master Qiu."

Fu Hongxue said, "We have not done right by him!"

Yan Nanfei was very astonished. "We haven't?"

Fu Hongxue's dagger-like gaze was focused on the girl beside him. He coldly said, "This girl is not Zhuo Yuzhen. She definitely is not!"

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## Chapter 10 – Changes

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The crying sound suddenly stopped.

Zhuo Yuzhen raised her head. She stared at Fu Hongxue with an astonished look on her face. “I’m not Zhuo Yuzhen? Why do you say that I am not Zhuo Yuzhen?”

Fu Hongxue did not answer her. Instead, he asked a question he should not have asked. “How many months pregnant are you?”

Zhuo Yuzhen hesitated for a while, before finally saying, “Seven months.”

Fu Hongxue said, “You’ve already been pregnant for seven months, but your father only just found out about it today? Is he blind?”

Zhuo Yuzhen said, “He isn’t blind, but he also isn’t my real father.”

Her voice was filled with hatred. “He knew about this all along. He was the one who arranged for me to meet with Qiu Shuiqing, because Qiu Shuiqing was a famous figure of the martial world and the master of the Peacock Manor, as well as the person whom escort-chief Liu admired the most.”

Yan Nanfei interjected, “Escort-chief Liu? Liu Zhenguo, of the Zhenyuan escort agency? Your father is a trainer for the Zhenyuan escort agency?”

Zhuo Yuzhen said, “He used to be.”

Yan Nanfei said, “And now?”

Zhuo Yuzhen said, “He drinks too much alcohol. No escort agency wants a martial arts instructor who is drunk all the time.”

Yan Nanfei said, “Escort-chief Liu dismissed him from his service?”

Zhuo Yuzhen nodded. "Escort-chief Liu wasn't necessarily against drinking alcohol, but after drinking, father actually mistook one of his fellow dart-instructors for a thief and even chopped off one of his hands. That was too excessive."

Yan Nanfei said, "He wanted to make use of the relationship you had with Qiu Shuiqing to return to the Zhenyuan escort agency?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "He really wanted to! Even if I truly was his daughter, he still would have done the same thing."

Yan Nanfei said, "Unfortunately, Qiu Shuiqing wasn't willing to do this. In addition, Liu Zhenguo wasn't a person who showed favoritism."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Thus, even though Qiu Shuiqing gave him a hundred taels of silver as drinking money every month, he still was not satisfied. Whenever he became drunk, he would think of ways to torment me."

Yan Nanfei said, "And it wasn't until today that you felt you could take no more?"

Zhuo Yuzhen forced herself not to cry. "I am female. Officially, I am his daughter. No matter what he does to me, I can take it. Only, this morning..."

Yan Nanfei said, "What did he do this morning?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "He wanted to beat the baby in my stomach to death. He didn't want me to give birth to Qiu Shuiqing's child, because...because he knows about the destruction of the Peacock Manor."

Yan Nanfei's face changed. "But that happened only last night. He shouldn't have known about it."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "But he did know."

Yan Nanfei's face sunk. Fu Hongxue's face became all the more pale.

Only one type of person would get the news so soon.

Even if he himself hadn't personally gone to the Peacock Manor to kill people last night, he definitely was a lookout.

Yan Nanfei said, "If I saw so many innocent people being wrongfully killed, when I got back home, I would've wanted to get really drunk as well."

Fu Hongxue was silent. Suddenly, he said, "Do you know Liu Zhenguo? What type of person is he?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The Zhenyuan escort agency covers a lot of territory. It isn't an easy task to become the leader of the agency."

Fu Hongxue said, "Is he good at using human resources?"

Yan Nanfei said, "All of his subordinates are experts and first-class experts."

Fu Hongxue's hands tightened.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "My foster-father's martial arts abilities are not weak. If alcohol hadn't harmed him, he might have become the leader as well."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "It is very hard to be the leader of an escort agency. It is very easy to kill people."

Yan Nanfei said, "You believe him to be one of the killers?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Not a killer, an accomplice!"

Yan Nanfei said, "Then we should go find him right now."

Fu Hongxue said, "When we got into the carriage, I already issued orders to the driver. We are already headed in the right direction."

Zhuo Yuzhen looked directly at him. Liars definitely would not dare to stare into his eyes, and they definitely wouldn't be so calm and collected.

Yan Nanfei looked at her, then looked at Fu Hongxue. It seemed as though he too had some opinion he wished to speak.

But before he had even opened his mouth, a person loudly said, "We definitely cannot go to the Zhuo family right now."

Mingyue Xin was awake.

She had lost too much blood and her body was too weak. Clearly, she had used all of her available energy to say these words.

Yan Nanfei helped her lie down in a more comfortable position before asking, "Why is it that we cannot go to the Zhuo family?"

Mingyue Xin panted, "Because there definitely must be a trap there."

In her urgency to explain her line of thinking, her pallid face began to turn red. "Gongsun Tu definitely wouldn't let us off so easily. Naturally, he'll realize that we'll want to hunt down Zhuo Donglai. They have many people, all of whom are experts, and now I am injured."

Yan Nanfei wouldn't let her finish. "I understand what you are trying to say, and so does Fu Hongxue."

Mingyue Xin said, "No, you do not understand. I'm not saying this out of fear for myself, and I know that the two of you are definitely enough to deal with them. But what about Miss Zhuo? You two will have to defend against Yang Wuji's sword, Gongsun Tu's hook, and Xiao Siwu's flying dagger. How will you have the extra energy to look after her?"

Fu Hongxue did not speak, nor did he respond.

Mingyue Xin looked at him. "You absolutely must listen to me this time. We should have the carriage come to a stop immediately."

Fu Hongxue said, "No need."

Mingyue Xin said, "Why...why aren't you willing?"

Fu Hongxue's features were still totally expressionless. He dully said, "Because this road isn't the road which will take us to the Zhuo family."

Mingyue Xin was startled. "It isn't? Why isn't it?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because from the very beginning, I ordered him to take this carriage out of the city as quickly as possible. How would he dare to go on any other road?"



Mingyue Xin let out a relieved breath. "So you had the same line of thought as I did."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "I never take risks with the lives of others."

Mingyue Xin said, "But just a while ago..."

Fu Hongxue said, "I only said what I said in order to test Miss Zhuo."

But before he finished his words, the carriage came to a halt.

The carriage driver turned around. Grinning, he said, "We've already reached the outskirts of the city. Hero Fu, which road do you want to take?"

Fu Hongxue coldly stared at his smiling face. He suddenly asked, "Have you learned the martial arts of the Boundless Pre-Heaven Sect?"

The carriage driver's smile suddenly turned stiff. "I've never learned any martial arts at all."

Fu Hongxue ignored him. He asked again, "Are Zhao Wuji and Zhao Wuliang your teachers or your family elders?"

The carriage driver stared at him in shock, as though he had seen a ghost.

He was very skilled at driving carriages. This entire time, he had sat in the front, driving the carriage. Not only had he not performed any actions, he had been very obedient.

He really could not understand how this pale-faced freak managed to determine his origins with a single glance.

Fu Hongxue said, "The color of your skin is smooth, and the texture is finely detailed, as though it had been boiled in oil. Only a person who has practiced the martial arts of the Boundless Pre-Heaven Sect would be like this."

What a keen eye this freak had!

The driver finally let out a sigh. With a forced smile, he said, "I am Zhao Ping. Zhao Wuji is my father."

Fu Hongxue said, "Are you nicknamed 'forefinger'?"

Zhao Ping forced himself to nod. He could already tell that lying to this freak would be extremely unwise.

Fu Hongxue said, "Based on your family background, you should not be doing such shameless things in secret. I should help the Boundless Pre-Heaven Sect purge itself."

Zhao Ping's countenance changed. "But I..."

Fu Hongxue didn't let him speak. He coldly said, "If it weren't for the fact that you are the only son of Zhao Wuji, you would already be dead and underneath the wheels of this carriage."

He was sitting in the carriage. He hadn't even moved.

The most flexible finger was the forefinger.

How could a man sitting in a carriage without moving kill Zhao Ping, who was as flexible as a forefinger?

Zhao Ping finally understood. He was about to rise up.

Fu Hongxue said, "I will not kill you today. I will only require that you leave behind one of your murderous hands!"

Zhao Ping suddenly laughed loudly. "I apologize. My hands are still useful, and so I cannot give them to you."

Suddenly, a saber flash could be seen, followed by a flowering explosion of blood.

Zhao Ping's form rose up in alarm. He suddenly saw a bloody hand fall down from thin air.

He still hadn't realized that this was his own hand.

The sabre was too fast. He still hadn't felt any pain.

He even was still laughing.

Only after the hand fell to the floor did he realize that he was missing one.

The sound of his laughter immediately turned into a miserable cry. His body tumbled down heavily.

The sabre flash had disappeared. The sabre had been sheathed.

Fu Hongxue still remained seated in the back without moving.

Zhao Ping bound his severed wrist with fabric from his clothes. With his sole remaining hand, he rolled up the window of the carriage, staring at Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue said, "You still aren't leaving?"

Gritting his teeth, Zhao Ping said, "I am not leaving. I want to see your sabre."

Fu Hongxue said, "My sabre isn't for viewing."

Zhao Ping said, "You chopped off my hand. You should at least allow me to see your sabre."

Fu Hongxue stared at him, then suddenly said, "Fine. Look!"

A sabre flash. Strands of severed hair floated in the air.

It was Zhao Ping's hair.

By the time he saw these strands of severed hair, the sabre flash had disappeared.

The sabre had been sheathed.

He still hadn't seen the sabre.

His face was contorted with terror. He suddenly took one step backwards after another. He cried out in alarm with a hoarse voice, "You aren't human. You are a vicious ghost. You are using an evil sabre!"

A pitch-black sabre. A pair of pitch-black pupils.

Zhuo Yuzhen was also staring at the sabre. She also stared at it for a long time. Her eyes were filled with terror as well.

It seemed as though this sabre had become physically grafted onto Fu Hongxue's hand. It had become part of his body.

Zhuo Yuzhen asked probingly, "Have you ever put this sabre down?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Never."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Can you let me see it?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Have you ever let anyone see it?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Never!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Is this really a evil sabre?"

Fu Hongxue said, "The evil lies not in the sabre. It lies within the heart. If a person holds evil within his heart, he will not be able to avoid this sabre!"

He did not move. The carriage did not move either.

Yan Nanfei let out a sigh. "It seems as though there's no longer any place for us to go."

Fu Hongxue said, "There is."

Yan Nanfei said, "Where?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Peacock Manor."

Yan Nanfei was very surprised. "Peacock Manor again? What's left there?"

Fu Hongxue said, "A secret cellar."

Yan Nanfei immediately understood. "You want Mingyue Xin to hide herself there to recuperate?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No one will guess that she is there. That place is a place of death."

Yan Nanfei said, "Would this, then, be considered rebirth in a place of death?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Yan Nanfei said, "Will we still use this carriage?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Carriages cannot reveal secrets, nor can they betray people."

Yan Nanfei said, "Only people can betray people. That's why you got rid of Zhao Ping."

Fu Hongxue said, "Correct."

Yan Nanfei said, "Who will drive our carriage now?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You."

Although a big hole had been blown into the stone wall of the hidden cellar, the rest of it was as solid as it ever was.

Yan Nanfei said, "Now, the only way a person can leave this place is through this hole."

Fu Hongxue said, "There can be leaving, but there cannot be a person leaving."

Yan Nanfei said, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because Mingyue Xin still has the Peacock Plume."

Yan Nanfei said, "Her Peacock Plume is still useful?"

Fu Hongxue said, "It is."

Yan Nanfei said, "So long as she stands guard here with her Peacock Plume, nobody will be able to charge in?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Nobody."

Yan Nanfei sighed. "No matter what, I hope that no one else will come here."

Zhuo Yuzhen couldn't help but say, "Do you intend to leave her here by herself?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Who will stay behind with her?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "How about you guys? Are you leaving?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Where are you going?"

Fu Hongxue said, "We are going to kill people!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Are you going to kill those murderers?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "Gongsun Tu won't let us off. Nor can I let him off!"

Zhuo Yuzhen stared at the sabre in his hand. "Do all murderers have evil in their heart?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Will he definitely be unable to avoid your sabre?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Definitely."

Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly knelt down, and her tears began to flow. "I beg you, bring his heart back here. I want to use his heart as a sacrifice to memorialize the father of my child."

Fu Hongxue stared at her. He suddenly said, "I can do this sort of thing, but you cannot say that sort of words."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because those words contain a murderous aura."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Are you afraid that the child in my belly will be contaminated by the murderous aura?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "A child with a murderous aura will find it difficult to avoid killing others when he grows up."

Zhuo Yuzhen gritted her teeth. "I hope he will kill others. It's better to kill others than to be killed."

Fu Hongxue said, "You are forgetting one thing!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Go ahead."

Fu Hongxue said, "Killers will themselves be killed, sooner or later!"

The room was gloomy and dark. Even the tables and the chairs were made out of stone. They were both hard and cold.

Mingyue Xin, however, was seated very comfortably, because before he left, Fu Hongxue gave her all of the mattresses in the carriage.

Zhuo Yuzhen also was given one of the soft mattresses from the beautiful carriage.

As soon as Fu Hongxue left, she couldn't help but sigh. "I didn't imagine he was such an attentive person."

Mingyue Xin said, "He's a weird person. Yan Nanfei is weird as well. But both of them are people, and both of them are men, real men."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "It seems that both of them treat you pretty well."

Mingyue Xin said, "I treat them pretty well as well."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "But in the end, you'll have to choose between them. One woman can't be married to two men."

Mingyue Xin forced out a laugh. "I've already made my choice."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Who have you chosen?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Myself."

She lightly continued, "Although a woman can't be married to two men at once, she can refuse to marry either."

Zhuo Yuzhen shut her mouth. Naturally, she could tell that Mingyue Xin was unwilling to discuss this any further.

Mingyue Xin gently stroked the Peacock Plume. Her hands were even colder than gold. Something was weighing on her mind.

Did the words of Zhuo Yuzhen provoke her thoughts?

After a long time, Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly asked, "Is the Peacock Plume in your hands real?"

Mingyue Xin said, "It is not."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Can I see it?"

Mingyue Xin said, "You cannot."

Zhuo Yuzhen couldn't resist asking, "Why not?"

Mingyue Xin said, "Because even though it isn't the real Peacock Plume, it is still a tool for killing people, and it carries a murderous aura. I, too, am unwilling to allow the child in your stomach to be contaminated with a murderous aura."

Zhuo Yuzhen looked at her. She suddenly laughed, "Do you know why I am laughing?"

Mingyue Xin said, "I do not!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I suddenly feel as though your speech mannerisms are absolutely identical to those of Fu Hongxue. Therefore..."



Mingyue Xin said, "Therefore?"

Zhuo Yuzhen laughed again. "Therefore, if you absolutely had to marry someone, I think you would definitely marry him."

Mingyue Xin laughed as well, but her laughter was very forced. "It's a good thing that I do not absolutely have to marry someone."

Zhuo Yuzhen hung her head. "But I do."

Mingyue Xin said, "Why?"

Zhuo Yuzhen sadly said, "Because of my child. I can't allow him to be without a father."

Mingyue Xin also couldn't resist probing further. "Who do you want to be his father?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Naturally, I would want a real man, a man who could protect me."

Mingyue Xin again couldn't resist asking, "A man like Fu Hongxue?"

Zhuo Yuzhen actually did not deny it.

Mingyue Xin's laughter became even more forced. "Do you know how heartless he is?"

Zhuo Yuzhen faintly smiled. "Sentimental or heartless. How can one really tell?"

"Are we still riding this carriage?"

"Mmhmm."

"Who should be the driver now?"

"You."

Yan Nanfei finally couldn't control his anger. "Why is it still me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I don't know how."

Yan Nanfei started. "Why is it that whenever I hear your words, I am startled?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I speak the truth."

Yan Nanfei could only leap onto the front of the carriage. Whipping the horse, he said, "See? This isn't very hard at all. Everyone knows how. Why don't you learn how?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Since everyone knows how, then anyone can drive for me. Why must I learn?"

Yan Nanfei was startled yet again.

"You really do speak nothing but the truth." He shook his head, a wry smile on his lips. "But I wish you would tell a lie once in a while."

"Why?"

"Because the truth never seems to be as comfortable as a lie."

The carriage moved forward. It travelled for a very long time. Fu Hongxue was meditating the entire time. He suddenly said, "You recognize the person who was playing chess with Yang Wuji?"

Yan Nanfei nodded. "He is called Gu Qi. He one of Gongzi Yu's major subordinates."

Fu Hongxue said, "I hear he has four master martial artists in his employ. Together, they are known as 'Zither [Qin], Chess [Qi], Calligraphy [Shu], Art [Hua]'."

Yan Nanfei said, "There are five master martial artists. Yu Qin, Gu Qi, Wang Shu, Wu Hua, and Xiao Jian [Sword]."

Fu Hongxue said, "You have met all five of them?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I only met three. At that time, Gongzi Yu hadn't met Yu Qin and Xiao Jian."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. "When was that?"

Yan Nanfei shut his mouth.

Fu Hongxue refused to let it drop. He continued to ask, "Was it when you and Gongzi Yu often met with one another?"

Yan Nanfei's mouth was still shut.

Fu Hongxue said, "You know all of his secrets. You are very familiar with all of his highest ranking subordinates. Naturally, the two of you had many dealings in the past."

Yan Nanfei did not deny it. He could not deny it.

Fu Hongxue said, "What type of relationship do the two of you have, exactly?"

Yan Nanfei coldly said, "Everyone always says that you value your words as highly as gold. Why do I always feel as though you are an overly talkative person?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because you will not lie, but are afraid to tell the truth."

Yan Nanfei said, "Right now, I am talking about you, not me."

Fu Hongxue said, "But the one I am talking about is you."

Yan Nanfei said, "Can we talk about something else? Even now, I still have no idea where you are taking us!"

Fu Hongxue said, "You know. In order to kill a hunter, you must go to the place where he has set his traps."

Yan Nanfei said, "The home of Zhuo Donglai then?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Originally."

Yan Nanfei said, "No longer?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Dead people have no homes."

Yan Nanfei said, "Zhuo Donglai is already a dead man?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Thus, that place is now nothing more than a trap."

Yan Nanfei let out another sigh. "I only hope that those hunters are still there and have not left."

Fu Hongxue said, "They probably have not yet left. To be a hunter, the first thing one must learn is patience."

Zhuo Donglai really was a dead man. Even his corpse was ice cold.

This wasn't strange at all. If one's chosen profession is murder, the first thing one should learn is how to silence witnesses! So long as you join assassins in even one of their activities, you should be prepared to be killed and silenced at any point in time. In their eyes, a person's life definitely was not worth more than that of a wild dog.

Zhuo Donglai had been killed like a wild dog, beneath the tree in the courtyard.

Fu Hongxue saw him from afar. His eyes were filled with sorrow and melancholy.

Life was originally a precious thing. Why is it that some people simply refuse to cherish it?

He pitied this man, perhaps only because he himself had been ruined by the word 'alcohol' before.

Alcohol wasn't a bad thing in and of itself. The problem lies within one's self.

If you yourself are willing to sink into vice and are unable to extricate yourself, then there is definitely no one in the entire world who can rescue you.

Yan Nanfei's thoughts and feelings on this clearly were not as deep as his. He was still young. His heart was still filled with lofty ideals and aspirations.

Thus, he only wanted to ask, "The trap is here. Where are the huntsmen?"

Fu Hongxue was silent. Before he had a chance to open his mouth, there was a light cry from the back of the house. "Ware the dagger!"

The dagger gleamed, looking like a bolt of lightning as it flew towards his back. Fu Hongxue did not dodge, did not move. It was his sabre which moved!

With a clanging sound, sparks exploded in all directions. A dagger flash filled the sky, appearing as though it had pierced through the clouds and left the world.

Fu Hongxue's sabre was already sheathed.

Yan Nanfei let out a breath. "Looks like at least one person remains here."

Fu Hongxue dully said, "I can tell that he has long since learned the art of patience."

Just as they finished these two sentences, the dagger flash fell down from the heavens. When it fell down, it fell down in two parts as the parts crashed down to earth like meteorites.

It was the handle and blade of a flying dagger!

The four inch long flying dagger had been snapped in half.

The flying dagger had attacked him, but his sabre had countered the dagger. The dagger flew many meters up into the air.

Who could imagine the speed with which this flying dagger had been sent out?

But with a backwards flip of his sabre, Fu Hongxue had deflected this knife, snapping in half its blade, which had been refined and smelted a hundred times over.

Someone sighed from within the room. "Truly an incomparable sabre technique. You did not misspeak."

Fu Hongxue slowly turned around. "Why haven't you left yet."

As soon as he turned around, he saw Xiao Siwu.

Xiao Siwu walked out empty-handed. He coldly said, "The 'four withouts' of my name does not include 'without shame'. Even if I were to leave, I would leave openly and with dignity."

He had no dagger in his hands, appearing as though he were a virgin who had suddenly been stripped naked. He didn't even know what he should do with his hands now.

But he did not flee.

Fu Hongxue looked at him. "You have only one dagger?"

Xiao Siwu said, "The person I came to fight today is you. I can only bring one dagger!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Why?"

Xiao Siwu said, "Because I know that the first dagger is the last dagger. Thus, when I strike out with that first dagger, I must use all of my strength."

Fu Hongxue said, "You forced yourself into a deadly situation, so that when you strike, you would strike whole-heartedly?"

Xiao Siwu said, "Precisely so."

He slowly added, "In addition, after I strike with that first dagger, I must succeed in landing the strike. Otherwise, even if I had hundreds or thousands of other daggers, none of them would land."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. He suddenly waved his hand. "Well said. Leave!"

Xiao Siwu said, "You are letting me leave?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I am not going to kill you this time, only because you said three words."

Xiao Siwu said, "What three words?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Ware my dagger!"

Before he sent out his flying dagger, he had given a warning. This definitely was not how a despicable, contemptible man would act.

Fu Hongxue said, "My sabre only kills evil, deceitful people. Your dagger is evil and deceitful, but you yourself are not."

Xiao Siwu's hands suddenly clenched. A strange expression suddenly appeared in his eyes. After a long time, he slowly said, "If I had not said those three words, would you have been able to defeat my dagger?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You regret it?"

Xiao Siwu said, "Not regret. I just want to know the truth."

Fu Hongxue stared at him for a long time. He coldly said, "If you had not said those three words, you would be a dead man right now!"

Xiao Siwu did not say a single word further. He turned around and left. He walked very quickly, and did not look back.

Someone else sighed in the room. "Even if he does not regret it, you will regret it."

A man slowly walked out, dressed in black clothes and white socks. It was Gu Qi.

Fu Hongxue said, "Regret it? Regret what?"

Gu Qi said, "Regret not killing him!"

Fu Hongxue's hands clenched tightly. He had two chances to kill that arrogant youngster, but he had given up both of them.

Gu Qi said, "Once a golden opportunity is missed, it will never come again. If you want to kill someone, abstain from nothing."

He laughed, then continued. "This time, you did not kill him. I fear that next time, you will die to him."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. He suddenly laughed coldly. "And you? Should I kill you this time?"

Gu Qi said, "That depends. Do you want to kill my central pieces, or the great dragon I have to the right? Are you playing the white pieces, or the black pieces?" [These are, obviously, all chess references.]

Fu Hongxue did not understand. He did not play chess. Only people of leisure played chess. Whenever he had free time, he gripped his sabre.

Thus, Gu Qi could only laugh alone. "What I meant to say is, you cannot kill me, you can only kill my chess pieces, because I only know how to play chess. In addition, this chess game is between you guys. I am not involved. You cannot even kill my chess pieces."

Smiling, he walked past Fu Hongxue. He knew that Fu Hongxue definitely would not strike, because he did not guard himself at all and anyone could kill him. But Fu Hongxue was not anyone. Fu Hongxue was Fu Hongxue.

Yan Nanfei watched as he walked away. He suddenly laughed. "Looks like you didn't make the wrong move."

Gu Qi said, "But I lost three games in a row today."

Yan Nanfei said, "You lost to Yang Wuji?"

Gu Qi said, "He is the only one who can beat me."

Yan Nanfei said, "Why?"

Gu Qi said, "Because he treats killing chess pieces the same way as he treats killing people. He abstains from nothing at all, whereas I have burdens on my mind."

Yan Nanfei said, "Burdens on your mind?"

Gu Qi said, "I am afraid of losing at chess."

Only people who fear losing at chess will lose chess matches that they should not have lost. The more they are afraid, the more they will lose. The more they lose, the more afraid they become.

Only people whose hearts are filled with fear will kill people they should not kill. Fear of justice. Fear of truth.



The night was very deep.

Gu Qi walked out the door. He suddenly turned around, then said, "I recommend that you two leave as well."

Yan Nanfei said, "There is no longer anyone here?"

Gu Qi said, "None living. Only the dead."

Yan Nanfei said, "Gongsun Tu and the others are not inside?"

Gu Qi said, "They didn't even come, because they were impatient to go to another place."

Yan Nanfei said, "Where did they go?"

Gu Qi said, "Wherever you came from, that is the place they went."

Yan Nanfei wanted to ask further, but Gu Qi had already departed. Yan Nanfei chased out the door, but he had already disappeared.

He could only hear Gu Qi's voice float towards them from far away. "The legends say that when the peacock dies, the bright moon [Mingyue] will sink down as well. It will sink to the ground, sink to the sea..."

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## Chapter 11 – Where Did the Bright Moon Go?

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The night was deep. The world was covered in darkness.

Because tonight, there was no bright moon.

Was tonight's bright moon already dead?

Yan Nanfei whipped the horse into a mad gallop, while Fu Hongxue sat next to him, unmoving.

What a beautiful horse-carriage. What a somber carriage interior.

"Why must we ride the carriage?"

"Because we have a carriage!"

"The horse is already tired. An exhausted horse can't carry two people, but it can pull a carriage!"

"Because the carriage has wheels?"

"Correct. We have legs as well. Why can't we walk?"

"Because we are tired as well. We need to conserve our energy."

"Conserve it for killing?"

"As long as they are people to kill, as long as there are people who should be killed."

The peacock was dead.

The Peacock Manor was no longer the Peacock Manor.

There were a few spots of light in the darkness. The faint light of the stars shined down upon the ruins, making the scene appear even more desolate.

The horse which had galloped to and fro for hundreds of li finally collapsed.

Nobody was in the underground cellar. There was nothing at all in there. Everything which could be removed had been removed!

The torch light was flickering, because the hand with which Yan Nanfei was holding the torch was shaking.

It is said that when the peacock dies, the bright moon would go down with it as well.

Yan Nanfei gnashed his teeth forcefully. "How did they know? How did they know that there would be people here?"

The hand with which Fu Hongxue was gripping his sabre did not tremble, but the muscles on his face were twitching. His pallid face had already begun to turn red, a bizarre red, a frightening red.

Yan Nanfei said, "When we came, there was definitely nobody following us. Who was it..."

Fu Hongxue suddenly howled, "Get out!"

Yan Nanfei was startled. "Are you telling me to get out?"

Fu Hongxue did not speak again. His lips were already closed tightly.

Astonished, Yan Nanfei looked at him. One step at a time, he retreated from the cellar. Before he had fully exited, Fu Hongxue suddenly collapsed, as though an invisible whip had struck him.

As soon as he collapsed, he started to go into convulsions.

That invisible whip seemed to continue to strike him, lashing him without end.

Fu Hongxue's entire body was contorted and twisted in his agony. Low growls constantly emanated from his throat, sounding like the dying growls of a wild animal. "I was wrong, I was wrong..."

With one hand, he scratched and clawed at the floor, appearing as though he were a man about to drown to death who was trying to grab an invisible wooden log to hold on to.

The ground was strewn with stone rubble. His fingernails disintegrated. His hand was starting to bleed.

His other hand continued to tightly clench his sabre.

The sabre was still the sabre!

The sabre is heartless, and so it endures perpetually.

Yan Nanfei knew that he definitely did not want anyone to see his current agony and his chronic illness.

But Yan Nanfei did not leave, because he knew that although the sabre was still the sabre, Fu Hongxue was no longer Fu Hongxue.

Right now, anyone who walked in could kill Fu Hongxue.

Why must heaven torment him so? Why must a man like this suffer an illness such as this?

Yan Nanfei was just barely able to control himself, preventing himself from shedding tears.

He extinguished the torch. He no longer could bear to watch any more.

But his hand was already gripping the hilt of his sword, hidden under his clothes.

In the middle of the darkness, the hole in the middle of the stone cliff appeared as though it were the mythical evil eye of some vile beast.

He swore an oath. If anyone wanted to charge into that hole right now, that person would immediately die underneath his sword!

He was certain of himself.

No one entered from the hole. But suddenly, the darkness was split by torch light.

Where did the torch light come from?

The torch light entered from the door. The door was opened. Five people came out.

Two of them held torches high. They stood at the entranceway. The other three strode inside.

The first person's right wrist was wrapped in white cloth. He wore a ribbon around his neck. His left hand was carrying a scimitar. His eyes were filled with hatred and enmity.

The man by his side was wearing a pitch-black Daoist robe. His footsteps were very sure and stable. He gave the appearance of being fully prepared for anything.

The last person's face was criss-crossed with scars. Although a hint of a smile played about his lips, it only made him look all the more insidious and cruel.

Yan Nanfei's heart sunk, while bile rose from his stomach. It tasted both sour and bitter.

He should have realized that although others might not be able to open those thirteen locks, Gongsun Tu was able to open them. The hole in the wall wasn't the only way by which one might enter or depart from this cellar.

None of them thought of this. All of them had been too certain of themselves. Thus, they had committed a fatal error.

Gongsun Tu suddenly stretched his hand out. He opened his palm, revealing a golden object sparkling in it. It was the awe-inspiring Peacock Plume.

The Peacock Plume was in his hands. What about Mingyue Xin?

Yan Nanfei was barely able to restrain himself and prevent himself from vomiting.

Gongsun Tu laughed. "You shouldn't have let her use this hidden projectile weapon to guard the hole. We are men, not mice. We don't know how to burrow through the ground or dig holes."

His laughter was extremely joyful. "If it hadn't been for the fact that she whole-heartedly focused on guarding that hole, it wouldn't have been easy for us to enter."

Yan Nanfei was unable to prevent himself from letting out a long sigh. "I was wrong."

Gongsun Tu said, "You really were wrong. You should have killed me!"

Yang Wuji lightly said, "Thus, in the future, you must remember my words. If you want to kill somebody, you should abstain from nothing at all."

Gongsun Tu said, "You shouldn't remind him. If he has a second chance, I'm a dead man for sure."

Yang Wuji said, "Will he have a second chance?"

Gongsun Tu said, "No."

Yang Wuji shook his head. He leisurely said, "The only person he is now capable of killing is himself."

Gongsun Tu said, "He could kill Fu Hongxue at least."

Yang Wuji said, "Fu Hongxue belongs to Zhao Ping. He isn't even able to move."

Yan Nanfei looked at them. He suddenly felt as though their words were coming from far away!

He should have concentrated all of his energy to defend against them.

He should have known that this was a critical, life-and-death point for him. They definitely wouldn't let him off, nor could he cower back.

Even if there were a place he could retreat to, he would not.

But he suddenly felt very weary.

Was it because, in his heart, he had already admitted that he wasn't a match for these two?

The bright moon had sunk and vanished. The undefeatable god of sabres had fallen. What hope could he still have?

Gongsun Tu was asking Zhao Ping, "Who cut off your hand?"

Zhao Ping said, "Fu Hongxue."

Gongsun Tu said, "Do you want to gain revenge?"

Zhao Ping said, "I do."

Gongsun Tu said, "How do you plan to handle him?"

Zhao Ping said, "I have a way."

Gongsun Tu said, "Why haven't you made your move yet? Can't you tell that this is your best chance?"

Yang Wuji said, "When a good opportunity is missed, it never comes again. If you wait for Fu Hongxue to wake up, it'll be too late."

Gongsun Tu said, "At this moment, you no longer need to worry about Yan Nanfei."

Zhao Ping couldn't help but ask, "Why not?"

Gongsun Tu said, "Because if he moves, Fu Hongxue will immediately turn into a peacock."

Zhao Ping said, "A peacock?"

Gongsun Tu said, "No matter who is struck by this Peacock Plume, that person will turn into a peacock. A dead peacock."

Zhao Ping laughed. "But I don't want for him to die so quickly."

Gongsun Tu laughed as well. "Neither do I."

Zhao Ping suddenly set down his scimitar, then charged in. He grabbed Fu Hongxue by his hair, lifted up his knee, then slammed it against his jaw. Next, he launched a chopping attack against his neck.

Just as Fu Hongxue's head was drooping down, Zhao Ping sent out a kick. It sent Fu Hongxue flying into the stone wall.

Next, he rushed over and put his right elbow across Fu Hongxue's throat. In a fierce voice he said, "Open your eyes and see who I am!"

The blue veins on Fu Hongxue's forehead were bulging out. He could neither resist nor breathe.

Zhao Ping sneered, "You chopped my right hand off, but I intend to use my left arm to break your neck."

The blue veins on Yan Nanfei's forehead were beginning to bulge out as well, as though he was unable to breathe as well.

Gongsun Tu grinned hideously. "Why don't you go rescue your friend? Can it be that you are just going to stand here and watch him die?"

Yan Nanfei couldn't move.

He knew that if he moved, Fu Hongxue would die even more quickly.

But he couldn't be still either.

Zhao Ping was using his other hand to ferociously slap Fu Hongxue's face. It seemed that he didn't intend to immediately take Fu Hongxue's life.

But this sort of humiliation was even worse than death.

Yan Nanfei tightly grasped the handle of his sword. Sweat dripped down from his head like rain. He suddenly said, "Even if you can kill him, you won't necessarily be able to kill me."



Gongsun Tu said, "What do you propose?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I want you to release him."

Gongsun Tu said, "What about you?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I am willing to die!"

Gongsun Tu laughed. "Not only do we intend for you to die, we do not intend to allow him to live."

Yang Wuji coldly said, "If you wish to kill someone, abstain from nothing at all."

Gongsun Tu's laughter stopped. He loudly shouted, "Zhao Ping, kill him! Kill him immediately!"

Zhao Ping gritted his teeth, then exerted strength with his elbow.

Just at this moment, there was a flash of sabre light.

It was Fu Hongxue's sabre!

In heaven or on the earth, it was a sabre without equal!

They all thought that this battle was practically a guaranteed victory, because they had all forgotten something.

Fu Hongxue's hand remained tightly clenched around his sabre.

Just at this moment, Yan Nanfei suddenly swept his sword about. Scarlet points of sword light sprayed about the room like rain, surrounding Gongsun Tu.

Yang Wuji's sword appeared as well.

His sword-drawing technique was skilled and ingenious, and his strike was accurate and efficient. His sword stabbed out at precisely the point which would be fatal for Yan Nanfei.

Even if Yan Nanfei was able to kill Gongsun Tu with his attack, he himself would definitely die to Yang Wuji's sword.

He had no choice but to retract his assault and defend himself.

Gongsun Tu's body immediately emerged from the ring of blood red light. He immediately flipped away and out past the door.

With a flourish of his sword, Yang Wuji retreated as well.

Naturally, there was no way Yan Nanfei would let them off. Just as he was about to chase them out, he suddenly heard a frightened cry and a loud shout. "Catch!"

A human shadow flew towards him. Her hair disheveled and her face bloody, it was Zhuo Yuzhen.

Fortunately, although Yan Nanfei's sword was quick, his eyes were even quicker. Just as his sword was about to pierce her, he pulled back at the last moment.

With a miserable cry, Zhuo Yuzhen fell against his body. At this moment, with a clanking sound, the steel door swung shut!

From behind the door, a series of clanging sounds could immediately be heard as all thirteen locks were once again locked. Aside from Gongsun Tu, no one else in the world could reopen this door.

Yan Nanfei stamped his feet. Not paying any attention to Zhuo Yuzhen, who was leaning against him, he turned around and immediately charged out from the hole in the wall.

"You take care of Miss Zhuo. I will come back and meet you with Gongsun Tu's head!"

Fu Hongxue's sabre had already left his scabbard. What misgivings might he have?

Now, the only thing he wanted to do was kill a person!

Kill a person who killed other persons!

## TWO

The tip of his sabre was still dripping with blood.

Zhao Ping had fallen beneath his sabre. Zhuo Yuzhen had fallen by his side. All she needed to do was to lift her head, and she would see blood dripping from that blade.

Blood dripped onto the stone floor, then splattered, breaking apart into a bloody mist.

Fu Hongxue stood there without moving. He watched as the fresh blood dripped down from his sabre.

Unexpectedly, his sabre remained unsheathed this time.

Zhuo Yuzhen forced herself to sit up. Her eyes remained locked onto that sabre.

She really wanted to see what was so remarkable and astonishing about this sabre.

When this sabre killed people, it always seemed as though it had been blessed by all the divinities in heaven, or cursed by all the demons of hell!

There must be many incredible magical inscriptions on this sabre.

She was disappointed.

The long and narrow blade of the sabre was crooked and curved. The edge of the sabre was sharp. The blood groove was shallow. Aside from that pitch-black handle, this sabre was no different from any other sabre.

Zhuo Yuzhen lightly let out a breath. "No matter what, at least I've seen your sabre. Should I feel grateful to this person who died to it?"

Her words were very slow and very soft, as though she were speaking to herself. Naturally, she actually wasn't.

She only wanted Fu Hongxue to know that if there was something she wanted to do, she would do it.

But as soon as she said these words, she knew that she had misspoken, because she saw Fu Hongxue's eyes.

Just a moment ago, his eyes had appeared to be very exhausted and very sorrowful. Now, they appeared even colder and sharper than the edge of his sabre.

Zhuo Yuzhen's body unconsciously shrunk back from him. She haltingly asked, "What did I say wrong?"

Fu Hongxue stared at her, as though he were a wild panther staring at his prey, ready to throw himself at her at any moment.

But after the flush from his face receded, he only let out a sigh. "We were all wrong. I was even more wrong than you. Why should I blame you?" Zhuo Yuzhen tried a question. "You were wrong too?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You spoke the wrong words. I killed the wrong person."

Zhuo Yuzhen stared at the corpse by his side. "You shouldn't have killed him? Didn't he intend to kill you?"

Fu Hongxue said, "If he really wanted to kill me, the corpse lying on the ground would be mine."

He lowered his head. His eyes were filled with deep remorse and sorrow.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Did he not kill you, in order to repay the kindness you showed him last time when you spared his life?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

That definitely wasn't repayment. If you chopped off someone's hand, the only way they could 'repay' you was by chopping off one of your own.

Perhaps it was just a strange sense of gratitude. Gratitude for making him think things he had never before thought of. Gratitude for allowing him to retain a little bit of dignity and self-respect.

Fu Hongxue understood his heart, but couldn't speak it aloud.

Some complicated but subtle emotions could never be articulated by anybody.

THREE

All the blood on his sabre had dripped off it.

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "This is the first time. It is also the last time."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I know. This is the first time you've killed the wrong person, and it is the last time as well."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "You are wrong again. A person who kills other people can kill the wrong person at any time."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Then what you are saying is..."

Fu Hongxue said, "This is the first time you have seen my sabre. It is also the last time."

His sabre finally entered the scabbard.

Zhuo Yuzhen summoned up all her courage. Laughing, she said, "This sabre isn't pretty at all. It's only a very ordinary sabre."

Fu Hongxue no longer wanted to continue speaking. But suddenly, he turned around. His pale face suddenly tightened. "How did you see this sabre?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "It was right in front of me. I'm not blind. How could I not see it?"

Her words were very reasonable, but she forgot something.

There was no light in here at all.

Fu Hongxue started training his eyesight when he was five. He spent day after day, year after day, in a hidden room that was dark and stuffy.

After ten years of training, he could see the ants and the mosquitoes in the hidden room. Now, he could obviously see Zhuo Yuzhen's face.

Precisely because he had trained his eyesight, he knew that this wasn't something easy to do at all.

How could Zhuo Yuzhen see his sabre?

Fu Hongxue's hand tightened around his sabre anew.

Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly laughed. "Maybe you haven't thought of this, but some people are born with night vision."

Fu Hongxue said, "You are one?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Not only do I have good night vision, I can see straight into the hearts of others."

Her laughter was very gloomy. "Right now, you must be wondering to yourself, am I the real Zhuo Yuzhen. Naturally, you won't think that I am a ghost or a monster, but I might be a spy sent to you by Gongsun Tu and the others. Maybe I am a very famous female assassin, and I might even have betrayed Mingyue Xin, because no one else knew that we were here."

Fu Hongxue could not deny it.

Zhuo Yuzhen looked at him. Tears appeared in her eyes. "Why do you never trust me? Why?"

Fu Hongxue was silent. After a long time, he slowly said, "Perhaps you shouldn't be so clever."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Why shouldn't I? How could a man like Qiu Shuiqing find a stupid woman to bear his children?"

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.

But Zhuo Yuzhen was unwilling to be silent. "My child will definitely be smart as well. Thus, I cannot allow him to be born without a father. I can't allow him to be regretful and in agony all his life."

Fu Hongxue's face began to twitch.

He understood her feelings. No one understood better than he did. He, too, was someone born without a father.

A smart child born without a father is a tragedy in and of himself. After he grows up, he will definitely create many tragedies for others.

Because he will always have more hatred in his heart than love.

Fu Hongxue finally sighed. "You can find a father on behalf of your child."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I already found one."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You."

The underground cellar was very dark. In the middle of the darkness, Zhuo Yuzhen's voice seemed to be coming from very far away.

"Only you are worth of being my child's father. Only you can guarantee that my child will live to grow up. Aside from you, there's definitely nobody else."

Fu Hongxue stood there like a log in the darkness. He only felt as though every muscle in his entire body was gradually becoming hard.

Zhuo Yuzhen then did something which was even more shocking.

She suddenly snatched Zhao Ping's scimitar. "If you refuse to agree, I might as well kill the child in my belly right now."

Fu Hongxue involuntarily cried out, "Right now?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Right now, because I feel that he is about to come out soon."

Although she was doing her best to restrain herself, her face was already becoming distorted with pain.

The pain women go through in childbirth is one of the most unendurable forms of pain known to humanity.

Fu Hongxue was even more shocked. "But you said you were only seven months pregnant!"

Zhuo Yuzhen laughed. "Children are disobedient by nature. A child in the stomach is even more so. When he wants to come out, no one can stop him."

Although her laughter was pained, it was filled with an indescribable maternal love and tenderness.

She softly continued, "Maybe it's because he is impatient to see the world. Maybe it's because he was made nauseous by the shaking those people gave him, and so..."

She no longer continued. The pain of childbirth had contorted her entire body.

But her hand continued to tightly grip that scimitar, much as how Fu Hongxue's own hand continued to grip his own sabre earlier.

She clearly had already made up her mind.

Fu Hongxue said, "I...I can be his foster father."

It seemed as though he had to use all the strength in his body to say these words. His voice was hoarse.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "A foster father cannot take the place of a true father. Unacceptable."

Fu Hongxue said, "What do you want from me?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I want you to let me be your wife. Only then will my child be your legal child."

Her labor pains came again. She gritted her teeth and forced out a laugh. "If you don't agree, I definitely won't blame you. I only ask that you bury our corpses within the graveyard of the Peacock Manor."

Could it be that these were her last words? If Fu Hongxue did not agree, she would immediately die!



Fu Hongxue was frozen with shock.

He had run up against the most powerful opponents and the most dangerous crises.

But he had never run up against such a tough problem.

It could be said that Qiu Shuiqing died because of him. It could be said that Zhuo Yuzhen was Qiu Shuiqing's wife.

Qiu Shuiqing's corpse had barely grown cold. How could he agree? How could he do something like this?

But from another perspective, it could be said that since Qiu Shuiqing died because of him, and since the four-hundred year long fame of the Peacock Manor had been destroyed in one night because of him, leaving behind this last vestige of their bloodline in Zhuo Yuzhen, no matter what sacrifices he might make, he must agree to protect her and let her smoothly give birth, and protect her child as he grew up.

How could he not agree?

If you ran up against something like this, what would you do?

The time between each contraction grew steadily shorter. The pain became more acute. The sharp tip of the scimitar had already pierced her clothes.

Fu Hongxue finally made a painful decision. "I agree!"

"Agree to be my husband?"

"Yes."

Was this the correct decision?

Nobody can make that judgment. He himself could not either. Only, at this point in time, he had no other options.

If you were him, would you do the same thing?

FOUR

Panting, groaning, crying...suddenly, all of it came to a halt. Everything became as silent as death.

Then, there was suddenly a loud and clear sound of a baby crying. It pierced the sudden stillness, bearing with it a new life into the world.

Fu Hongxue's hands were covered with blood, but it was the blood of life!

This time, his hands brought life, not death!

Life was hopping about.

As he looked at his hand, he felt as though his heart was filled with a leaping energy as well.

Zhao Ping's corpse remained there, fallen underneath his sabre. In that moment, he had stolen away a man's life.

But now, new life had been given birth to, a livelier, more dynamic life.

His earlier pain and sadness had been dispersed by the cry from the infant.

That bloody crime from earlier had been washed away by the blood of new life.

In this brief period of time, he had taken away a life as well as welcomed a new one.

This strange experience gave him a sudden, powerful, incomparably bright stimulus. His life had, without a doubt, become more lively and vigorous.

He had been baptized by blood, much like how a phoenix was baptized by fire. He had gained a new life.

Although this sort of experience is painful, it is part of growing up. It is the most precious, the most irreplaceable thing in the world.

Because this is life!

The old die, the new are born. This is how life is.

Only now did Fu Hongxue truly gain a new understanding of life. A correct understanding!

He listened attentively to the sounds of life leaping about in his arms. He suddenly felt a sense of tranquility and joy which he had never before felt.

The real purpose of life and living, does it not center around bringing new life into the universe?

Zhuo Yuzhen asked him in a weak voice, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Fu Hongxue said, "It is both a boy and a girl!"

His voice was extraordinarily happy. "Congratulations, you've given birth to twins."

Zhuo Yuzhen let out a satisfied sigh. A happy smile appeared on her weary face. "I should congratulate you as well. Don't forget that you have become their father."

She wanted to stretch out her hands to hold her children, but she was too weak. She couldn't even lift her arms!

Just at this moment, there was suddenly a loud rumbling sound, as though Mt. Taishan had collapsed. Thousands of jin of stone tumbled down, striking the floor of the hidden cellar. Crushed stones shot out like arrows from the hole in the stone wall.

And then, the sole way out of this place was sealed once more.

Fu Hongxue almost lost control of himself and nearly let out a crazed howl.

New life had suddenly been born. Could it be that he would need to meet up with death anew?

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## Chapter 12 – Between Life and Death

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A fatal darkness! A deathly stillness!

True fear is not being without light or sound. True fear is being without hope.

The children were drinking milk. Only the sound of their suckling gave testament to the fact that life still existed here.

But how long could their lives be preserved?

Fu Hongxue was once more tightly gripping his sabre, but caught in this deadly trap, even his sabre was useless to break them out of here!

He should have gone and comforted Zhuo Yuzhen, but he didn't know what he should say. His mind was in turmoil.

He had always viewed life and death very lightly. But he couldn't do so for the children.

Although he wasn't their true father, they now had a miraculous connection to each other, a connection which was even more intimate than between children and their real fathers.

Because he had personally delivered these children with his own two hands, it was almost as though they were a continuation of his own life.

This sort of emotion was both complicated and subtle. The only reason why the world can continue to exist is because humanity is capable of this sort of emotion.

Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly said, "I heard Mingyue Xin say that you all were once trapped in here before."

Fu Hongxue grunted in agreement.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Since you were able to think of a way out in the past, you'll definitely be able to think of another way this time."

Her eyes were shining with light, filled with hope.

Fu Hongxue truly could not bear to extinguish that hope. But he also couldn't hide the truth from her.

"The reason we were able to escape last time was because there was a perfect weapon for smashing walls here."

But now, this place was empty. Aside from the four of them, there was only a corpse.

The corpse had already become cold and stiff. Sooner or later, they would be as well.

But a gleam of hope remained in Zhuo Yuzhen's eyes. "I often hear people say that your sabre is an unparalleled weapon!"

Fu Hongxue looked at the sabre in his hand. His eyes were filled with bitter hatred. "This is a tool for killing people, not saving people."

His bitter hatred wasn't directed towards others. It was directed towards himself. So long as he could save the children, he would be willing to do anything.

But there was nothing he could do at all.

Zhuo Yuzhen's hope finally died away. With an effort, she actually forced a smile to her face. "At least we still have one hope."

She consoled Fu Hongxue, "Yan Nanfei wanted you to wait here. He will definitely return."

Fu Hongxue said, "If he was going to return, he would have done so by now. Now, even if he returned, he would definitely assume that we weren't inside."

Zhuo Yuzhen shut her mouth.

Of course she knew that Fu Hongxue's words were true. Yan Nanfei definitely wouldn't think of the possibility that they would have stayed here for so long. Even less would he think of Fu Hongxue being buried alive here.

Based on Fu Hongxue's senses and reaction time, if anybody above them made the slightest movement, they should not have been able to hide it from him.

But who could have imagined that right at that moment, he was busy delivering those children? Who would have imagined that there would be the sound of infants crying here?

There are many things in the world which no one can predict at all. True events are sometimes more bizarre and fantastical than the events in legends.

The children started to cry again.

Cold sweat dripped down from the palm of Fu Hongxue's hand. He suddenly thought of something he could do for them.

Something which he originally would rather die than do.

But now, he definitely would have to do it.

Zhao Ping was also a well-travelled, world-wise person. Such a person would definitely carry certain emergency tools on his body.

Rifling through a dead man's possessions was something which made him nauseous just thinking about it.

But now, he was already doing just that.

He found a matchbook, a long roll of rope, a realgar gem designed to repel snakes and drive out disease, a bottle of medicine for cuts, a half-eaten piece of ginseng, a keychain, a pearl flower, a few ingots of gold, several banknotes for silver, and a letter.

Pearls and yellow gold were things which people originally would do anything to get their hands on, to the point where they would even

exchange their dignity for them. But right now, they had become worthless instruments.

Could it be that this was a form of satire?

After giving birth, a person would be weak. The children were drinking milk.

Anyone would know that right now, that which Zhuo Yuzhen needed the most was ginseng.

Fu Hongxue quietly pulled out his sabre, slicing away the parts which had been gnawed on. This was the first time he had pulled out his sabre for something which was not alive, and the second time Zhuo Yuzhen saw the sabre. He did not care.

The barriers which existed between him and her had been shattered during the childbirth.

A miraculous relationship existed between the two of them as well, now.

Zhuo Yuzhen didn't bring this up. She quietly accepted the ginseng, but her eyes were focused on that pearl flower.

It was a peony flower. Every single pearl on it was perfectly formed and without flaw.

A soft, sleek sheen. Ingenious workmanship. In the middle of the darkness, it appeared all the more beautiful and extraordinary.

Light appeared in her eyes again.

She was a girl after all.

The glamour cast by jewels and pearls is something which no girl can resist against.

Fu Hongxue hesitated for a while. Finally, he gave it to her.

Perhaps he shouldn't have done this. But at this moment in time, why bother preventing her from enjoying this last bit of pleasure, this last bit of joy?

Zhuo Yuzhen laughed. Her laughter was like that of a child's.

The children who were crying fell asleep.

Fu Hongxue said, "You should sleep as well!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I can't fall asleep."

Fu Hongxue said, "As long as you close your eyes, you will be able to fall asleep."

He could tell that she was already very tired. She had lost too much blood, and had undergone too much suffering and fear.

Her eyes finally closed. She immediately sunk deeper into the sweet, peaceful darkness.

Fu Hongxue silently watched her. A mother sleeping with her infants should be something of great joy and beauty. But now...

He gritted his teeth and made up his mind to not allow himself to shed tears.

Right now, he definitely would seek out every single thing which might help them escape. But although he had a pair of eyes that could see in the dark, he too was very tired right now.

He lit the match. The first thing he saw was eight characters on the seal of the letter.

"To Yan Nanfei, my little brother. Yu."

Yu?

Gongzi Yu?



Can it be that this letter was given by Gongzi Yu, for Zhao Ping to deliver to Yan Nanfei?

My little brother?

What relationship, exactly, did they once have?

Fu Hongxue mastered his curiosity. He folded the letter, then stored it in his clothes.

Zhao Ping hadn't had the chance to deliver this letter. He hoped to still have a chance to see Yan Nanfei again.

But he himself knew that the chance of that was really very small.

To Fu Hongxue, aside from this letter and the ginseng, the things found on Zhao Ping's body were totally worthless.

Because he had neglected something. There should not have been a pearl flower on the body of a man like Zhao Ping.

But when he thought of this, it was too late.

The mother and her children were still sleeping. A strange sound could suddenly be heard in the dark.

Fu Hongxue once more lit the match. He saw a snake scurry out from a stone cupboard, scurrying towards the dim left corner of the room.

They couldn't stand the smell of the realgar.

The cellar had no ventilation. The air gradually grew stale. The smell of the realgar became especially powerful.

Fu Hongxue immediately discovered something terrifying. Perhaps they wouldn't have to wait for hunger and thirst to kill them. They might suffocate to death.

Especially the children.

The children didn't yet have the ability to adapt to the environment.

At this moment, he discovered something else. Something which made him very happy.

After several snakes wriggled into that dark corner, they disappeared.

There must be a way out there.

If there was a crack in that corner of the wall, was it recently created by his actions, or had it always been there?

Even though he wasn't a snake, and didn't know whether the outside of the wall was above ground or underground.

As long as he had the opportunity, he definitely wouldn't let it slip.

He struck out with his sabre!

By the time Zhuo Yuzhen awoke, Fu Hongxue had been chopping at the stone wall for a long time. The cracks in the wall had gradually grown bigger, to the point where even the fattest of mice could get out.

Unfortunately, they weren't mice.

After the children woke up, they cried again. After they cried, they fell asleep once more.

Zhuo Yuzhen took off her outer clothes, laying it on the floor. She gently laid down the sleeping infants, then forced herself to stand.

Fu Hongxue was gasping. His clothes were sopping wet. A sleeping person might not notice, but he had expended too much energy. The thinning air seemed to have become intolerable to him.

He needed to escape immediately. He used even more energy. Suddenly, with a cracking sound, a notch appeared on the blade of his sabre.

This sabre had become part of his body, even a part of his life.

But he did not stop.

Zhuo Yuzhen bit off a piece of ginseng. She silently handed it to him.

Fu Hongxue shook his head. "The children need milk. You need it more than me."

Zhuo Yuzhen mournfully said, "But if you collapse, who can live?"

Fu Hongxue gritted his teeth. Another notch appeared on his sabre.

Zhuo Yuzhen's tears began to flow.

This was originally a matchless, incomparable sabre, even to overawe even the wind and the clouds and fill heroes with terror. But right now, it wasn't even as useful as a metal spade.

What a cruel, sorrowful thing this was!

Naturally, Fu Hongxue himself could understand this sentiment. He almost was really about to collapse.

Zhuo Yuzhen's hands suddenly silently moved towards him, filled with a sweet fluid.

As soon as Fu Hongxue opened his mouth, the fluid flowed past his lips. An indescribably sweet and refreshing feeling filled his heart.

This was her breast milk.

Fu Hongxue had sworn an oath to never again shed tears. But at this moment, he couldn't prevent the hot tears from forcing their way out from his eyes.

But just at this moment, something suddenly appeared in the middle of the crack on the stone wall. It was a sword.

A scarlet red sword!

There was a cloth wrapped around the sword, upon which was written ten words. These words were written with blood. "I have not died yet. You cannot die yet either!"

The children began to cry again.

A loud, sonorous boom stirred life awake!

Sunlight filled the sky.

The children finally saw the sun.

Fu Hongxue only hoped that all the children of the world who were born into darkness would be able to live under the sun.

"I actually already left. I left three times."

"But you came back three times."

"I don't know why I came back either. At first, I thought that you definitely wouldn't be inside here." Yan Nanfei was laughing. "Because even in my dreams, I never could have imagined that a day would come when Fu Hongxue would be buried alive by someone."

There wasn't the slightest hint of ill-will in his laughter. His heart was truly filled with joy. "The last time I came, I was planning to leave as well."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Because I suddenly heard a very strange sound. It sounded like someone eating fava beans."

"That was the sound of a sabre starting to chip."

"Whose sabre?"

"Mine."

Yan Nanfei's eyebrows rose and his mouth hung open. Shocked, he stared at Fu Hongxue, appearing as though he were even more shocked than he would be upon hearing that the world itself had chipped.

But Fu Hongxue only laughed. "My sabre is only a very ordinary sabre."

Yan Nanfei said, "Your hand?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I still have my hand."

Yan Nanfei said, "So long as you still have your hand, even a chipped sabre can kill people."

Fu Hongxue's laughter suddenly disappeared. "Where are they?"

Yan Nanfei sighed. With a bitter smile, he said, "They aren't here. I'm afraid I don't know where they are."

Far away, a carriage could be seen, but no one was there.

Fu Hongxue asked, "You rode a carriage here?"

Yan Nanfei chuckled. "I rode a carriage here all three times. I hate walking. If I have a chance to ride, I definitely won't walk."

Fu Hongxue looked at him. "Only because you hate walking? Not because of your leg?"

Yan Nanfei looked at him as well. He suddenly sighed. "Why is it that I cannot hide anything from you?"

The infants were wrapped in Fu Hongxue's outer garments. Yan Nanfei was suppressing his amazement the entire time. He didn't ask about it.

Because Fu Hongxue didn't bring it up at all.

He knew that if Fu Hongxue didn't want to bring up something, you had best pretend you don't know about it!

But Zhuo Yuzhen, smiling, was already calling out to him. "Uncle Yan, why don't you come see our children?"

Yan Nanfei finally could no longer contain himself. He couldn't help but ask, "Your children?"

Zhuo Yuzhen glanced at Fu Hongxue out of the corner of her eyes. "Can it be that he did not tell you?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Tell me what?"

Zhuo Yuzhen smiled beautifully. "One of these two children is surnamed Qiu, the other is surnamed Fu. The boy is the heir to the bloodline of the Qiu family. His name is Qiu Xiaoqing. The girl was born first. Her name is Fu Xiaohong."

Her eyes were filled with pride and satisfaction. "We already agreed to this. We have already..."

Her face blushed, and she lowered her head.

Yan Nanfei looked at her, then looked at Fu Hongxue. He looked even more shocked than earlier, when he heard that the sabre had chipped.

Fu Hongxue had turned around. He pulled the clothes firmly around the children, then said, "Why don't you get on the carriage first?"

Zhuo Yuzhen already sat inside the carriage. Only then did Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei slowly walk over.

The entire time, neither of them opened their mouths. After a long time, Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "You didn't think it possible?"

Yan Nanfei forced a laugh. "There are many things which are unthinkable in this world."

Fu Hongxue said, "You are opposed?"

Yan Nanfei said, "I know that you definitely had your own difficulties which are hard to discuss. Perhaps..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted his words. "If time could go back, I would still have made the same choice. The children cannot be without a father. Somebody must be their father."

Yan Nanfei's smile became genuine and optimistic. "Aside from you, I really can't think of anyone else who could be their father."

He walked very slowly, and his posture seemed to have become similar to that of Fu Hongxue's. He was coughing nonstop as well.

Fu Hongxue suddenly came to a stop. Staring at him, he said, "How many wounds did you take?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Not many."

Fu Hongxue suddenly reached out and pulled his clothes open. Across his firm and strong chest, there were two fingernail markings.

Purple fingernail scratches, appearing as though they had been dyed into his skin.

Fu Hongxue's pupils immediately contracted. "This is the 'Great Violet Palm of Decapitating Heaven and Shattering Earth'?"

Yan Nanfei grunted in agreement.

Fu Hongxue said, "Were you struck on the leg by the 'Bone Penetrating Nail' or the 'Soul Hunting Needle'?"

Yan Nanfei smiled bitterly. "If it was the 'Soul Hunting Needle', would I still be standing here?"

Fu Hongxue said, "People came from the Xingxiuhai plateau of the Western Regions?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Just one person!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Was the person who came Duo Qingzi, or Wu Qingzi?"

Yan Nanfei sighed. "Duo Qingzi is just as merciless when making his move." [This is a pun; Duo Qingzi means 'man of great tenderness and affection', while Wu Qingzi means 'man without mercy'.]

Fu Hongxue said, "Is the 'Bone Penetrating Nail' still in your leg?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The only thing in my leg is a hole."

He stretched out his hands, revealing a hidden projectile that sparkled in his palm with cold light.

If one were to choose the top ten most deadly hidden projectile weapons in the world, beyond a doubt the 'Bone Penetrating Nail' would be one of them. Yan Nanfei suddenly chuckled. "Fortunately, my luck isn't half bad. He shot out thirteen 'Bone Penetrating Nails'. I only got hit by one, and it didn't hit a vital point. I was able to run a bit faster than they were. Otherwise, even if Duo Qingzi didn't kill me, Yang Wuji would have taken my life."

His laughter seemed very cheerful. "Let me tell you a little secret. Although my skill in killing isn't as good as yours, my skill in running for my life is number one in the world."

Fu Hongxue reached into his clothes. Only after Yan Nanfei was finished speaking did he remove his hand, pulling the letter out with it. "Read it after you get in the carriage."

"Who will be driver?"

"Me."

Yan Nanfei laughed. "I seem to remember that you didn't know how to drive in the past."

Fu Hongxue said, "Now I do."

Yan Nanfei said, "When did you learn?"

Fu Hongxue stared at him. Suddenly, he said, "Did you always know how to run for your life?"

Yan Nanfei thought a moment, then shook his head.

Fu Hongxue said, "When did you learn how?"

Yan Nanfei said, "When I reached the point where I had no other choice but to do so."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth again. He believed that Yan Nanfei knew what he meant.

When a man reached a point where he must do something, he would do it.



The letter was very long, stretching across three scrolls of paper. Even before they got on the carriage, Yan Nanfei began to read.

He was always an impatient sort.

Fu Hongxue was very good at tamping down his curiosity. He didn't ask what the letter contained.

Evidently, it was a very amusing letter, as Yan Nanfei's eyes were filled with a hint of laughter.

Filled with a sort of cynical laughter.

He suddenly said, "It seems Gongzi Yu really is a good person. He really cares very much about me."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Yan Nanfei laughed. "He advises me to leave your company immediately, because you have become an almost pestilential creature. Anyone in your company will suffer misfortune."

He laughed loudly, then said, "He even wrote out a list for me."

Fu Hongxue said, "A list?"

Yan Nanfei said, "The list includes the names of all the people who wants to kill us. The people who want to kill you numbers one more than the people who want to kill me."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "One person isn't very much."

Yan Nanfei said, "Sometimes it isn't very much, sometimes it isn't very little. It depends on who this person is."

His laughter was very unhappy. "Strictly speaking, the person who wants to kill you can't even be considered a person."

Fu Hongxue said, "What is he, then?"

Yan Nanfei said, "He should at least be counted as ten people."

Fu Hongxue said, "Is it Wu Qingzi, of the Xingxiuhai plateau?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Compared to this person, Wu Qingzi can at most be considered a kid who just learned how to kill people."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who is this person?"

Yan Nanfei went into the carriage and closed the door, as though afraid that he himself might jump out. "It is a man who uses a sabre, a very special sabre."

Fu Hongxue said, "What sabre?"

Yan Nanfei pulled the carriage door a little tighter shut. Only then did he say, one word at a time, "The 'Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch'!"

The carriage was very spacious. Zhuo Yuzhen put the girl on her knee while holding the boy in her hands. Her eyes were focused on Yan Nanfei. Finally, she couldn't help but ask, "What type of sabre is the 'Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch'?"

Yan Nanfei forced out a laugh. "Strictly speaking, it cannot be considered a sabre."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "It should be considered ten?"

Yan Nanfei didn't directly respond. Instead, he asked her, "Did you see Xiao Siwu's dagger?"

Zhuo Yuzhen thought for a moment, then nodded. "I saw him before. He always uses a dagger to trim his nails."

Yan Nanfei said, "It would take at least five hundred daggers like that to forge a single 'Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch'!"

Zhuo Yuzhen sucked in a breath. "Five hundred daggers?"

Yan Nanfei asked again, "Do you know how many people he's killed with that sabre in a single blow?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Two people? Three? Five?"

Yan Nanfei let out a sigh. "With one chop, he killed twenty seven people. Every single one of their heads was split in two."

Zhuo Yuzhen's countenance changed. She tightened her grip around the child in her bosom. Staring out the window, she forced a laugh. "Are you trying to scare me?"

Yan Nanfei smiled bitterly. "If you see that sabre, you'll know whether or not I'm trying to scare you."

He suddenly shook his head. "But naturally, you won't see it. Heaven, bless and protect us. Don't let her see that sabre."

Zhuo Yuzhen asked no more questions, because she saw something very strange. "Look, there's a wheel there."

It wasn't at all strange for a carriage to have a wheel, but why would a wheel be rolling down the road by itself?

Yan Nanfei couldn't help but stick out his head to take a look. The expression on his face changed as well. "This wheel is from our carriage."

Before he finished speaking, the carriage began to tilt, slowly beginning to tilt towards one side of the road.

Zhuo Yuzhen cried out loud, "Look! Why is there half a horse there?"

Half a horse? How could there be such a thing as half a horse?

What was even more frightening was that this horse was still galloping forwards on two legs.

Suddenly, a storm of blood rain sprayed forth from it.

That half-horse ran for another seven or eight steps before falling down. Its liver, intestines, and internal organs fell onto the floor.

Yan Nanfei shouted loudly, "Careful!"

Before the sound of his voice dissipated, the carriage suddenly flipped around in mid-air, as though it had somersaulted.

Yan Nanfei rushed over, gathered Zhuo Yuzhen and the children to himself, then kicked the door open.

A hand stretched out from outside the door. Fu Hongxue's voice could be heard. "Grab hold."

Their two hands joined. Fu Hongxue gripped Yan Nanfei's hand, while Yan Nanfei held Zhuo Yuzhen and the children. With an exploding sound, both the adults and the children flew out from the door.

Next, with a thundering sound, the carriage crashed into a large tree by the side of the road.

It disintegrated.

High noon.

The weather was sunny and cheerful. The sunlight was gorgeous.

The fresh sunlight was shining on the road. But suddenly, a dark cloud covered it, blocking off the sunrays. It was as though even the sun couldn't bear to watch what had just happened.

The carriage had been shattered into many pieces.

The horse pulling the carriage had been chopped in twain. The back half was still attached to the carriage. The front half lay fallen by the road.

What had happened just then?

Zhuo Yuzhen tightly held her children, not letting her children cry. Although she herself didn't know what had just happened either, she was simply too frightened, so frightened that she forgot all of her pain.

Although she felt as though all the bones in her body had been ground to dust, fear had rendered her totally numb. And then, she couldn't help but vomit.

A young woodcutter was standing by the side of the road. He couldn't help but vomit as well.

He was just about to go on this road earlier, but he took a step back, because he saw this carriage charging this way.

The carriage-driver had a pallid face and appeared as though he wished he could make this carriage immediately travel eight hundred li.

"Can it be that this person is rushing to a funeral?"

The young, vigorous woodcutter was just about to curse at him, but before he even started, he saw a gleam of sabre light.

As a matter of fact, he couldn't tell if it was sabre light, or lightning.

All he saw was a gleam of light fly out from within the forest, and then...it suddenly split apart. The front half and the back half actually split apart.

The front half of the horse was actually still running with its two front legs.

What happened afterwards, the woodcutter didn't notice at all. He couldn't believe this was real.

He hoped this was a dream, nothing more than a bad dream.

But he was already vomiting.

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## Chapter 13 – Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch

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What type of sabre would be able to chop a horse in half at a blow?

No one saw it. The sabre light flew out from within the woods to the side of the road. The carriage was over a hundred meters away from it. From here, neither man nor sabre could be seen. Fu Hongxue stood guard in front of Zhuo Yuzhen and the children. His eyes were still focused on that dense, forested area. His ashen pale face was so white, it was nearly translucent.

Yan Nanfei let out a breath. He immediately asked, "Did you see that sabre?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Yan Nanfei said, "But you must know what sabre that was."

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Yan Nanfei sighed. "It seems Gongzi Yu's information is extremely accurate. Miao Tianwang really has come." [Tianwang means 'Heaven's Monarch'].

Miao Tianwang's sabre would naturally be the 'Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch'!

Fu Hongxue tightened his hands. He coldly said, "I'm afraid that plenty of people have come."

Just at this moment, two large wagons rolled up on each side of the road, sealing off both sides.

On top of one wagon was placed several wooden planks, upon one of which two people were playing chess. The second wagon had two people on top as well. One was trimming his nails, and the other was drinking. Each seemed to be very intent on what they were doing, and nobody so much as glanced aside.

It seemed as though Fu Hongxue and Yan Nanfei didn't see them either.

On top of the wagon to the right, there were several women seated. Some were old, some were young. Some were embroidering, others were peeling melon seeds. Some were even combing their hair. The oldest one was the Ghostly Granny. On top of the second wagon was an open wooden coffin, as well as a large copper pot which hung off a steel peg.

It was said that the largest pot in the world was Shaolin's rice-cooking pot. Shaolin had many monks who never tasted grease or oil, but worked hard all day. Naturally, the amount of rice they could eat was prodigious. If we estimate each monk as eating five bowls of rice per meal, how much rice would five hundred monks eat? How large must the cooking pot be, in order to allow all those monks to be full?

Yan Nanfei had gone to Shaolin once, just to see that pot. He was a curious man by nature.

It seemed as though the red copper pot on the car was no smaller than that of Shaolin's cooking pot. What was even stranger was that there actually was someone in the pot. With a large face, a plump head and big ears. Many scars criss crossed his forehead, dropping down from it like venomous snakes. They stretched down, all the way from his forehead to his mouth. They made his face, which looked as though it originally would seem very gentle, appear unspeakably foul and evil.

The wagons were not moving very quickly. The copper pot gently waved, almost as though the man inside were resting in a hammock.

The dark clouds went far away. The sun once more rose up, but Yan Nanfei's heart was sinking.

But he absolutely had to force himself to maintain a smile. He muttered to himself, "Unexpectedly, Duo Qingzi didn't come after all."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "If the first strike does not land true, fully withdraw. This is the long-established rule of their Xingxiuhai sect."

Yan Nanfei's laughter seemed to become more cheerful. "Aside from him, it seems as though everyone who should come has come. Everyone who shouldn't have come, came as well."

He stared at the fatty with the scarred face in the copper pot. Smiling, he continued, "Chef Hao, why did you come as well?"

The 'vipers' on the fatty's face were wriggling. He was smiling, but his smile made his face look all the more vicious and cunning. "I came to receive the remains."

Yan Nanfei said, "What remains?"

Chef Hao said, "Any remains. I'll receive a dead horse's remains into my belly, and receive a dead man's remains into a coffin."

The wagons came to a full stop. The chess players continued to play chess, the drinker was still holding his cup, and the ladies brushing their hair continued to brush their hair.

Chef Hao laughed, "Looks like all of you will be lucky diners today. Chef Hao's 'Five Spices Horseflesh' isn't something that just anybody can taste."

Yan Nanfei said, "Your specialty dish doesn't seem to be the 'Five Spices Horseflesh'."

Chef Hao said, "It's hard to find the materials needed for my specialty dish. It's best if we just make do with the 'Five Spices Horseflesh'."

After he finished speaking those words, he hopped out of his pot and got off the wagon. If the people present hadn't witnessed it with their own eyes, they would never have imagined that a fatty who weighed several hundred jin could move so quickly and agilely.

He also had a large knife on him. A vegetable knife.

Zhuo Yuzhen couldn't help but ask, "Is Chef Hao really a good chef?"

Yan Nanfei said, "He's a sham."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Then why do they call him 'chef'?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Because he likes to cook, and because he uses a vegetable knife."



Zhuo Yuzhen said, "What is his specialty dish?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Flame-roasted human hearts, lightly fried human waists."

The young woodcutter had just finished vomiting. As soon as he lifted up his head, he froze. Even in his wildest dreams, he never would have imagined that this place would have suddenly become so crowded.

Today, all he had eaten was two steamed buns and a few salted vegetables. He had already thrown up everything, leaving nothing behind in his stomach. But after he took a few more glances, he began vomiting again, even more than last time.

Chef Hao brandished his knife. With a single chop, he cut off a large piece of horseflesh and horse skin, then threw it into that copper pot. He chopped downwards with his right hand, and tossed meat upwards with his right. His hands moved up and down in tandem, his movements skillful and practiced. In the twinkling of an eye, the horse was chopped into over a hundred and thirty pieces, as easily as others chop tofu.

The horseflesh was in the pot. What about the five spices?

Chef Hao wiped the blood from his sabre off on the sole of his shoes, then walked back and opened up the coffin. The coffin was filled with all sorts of ingredients, oils, salts, sauces, vinegar, fennel, aniseeds...any ingredients you could think of were in that coffin.

Chef Hao mumbled to himself, "We can use the broken, splintered carriage as kindling. By the time all the wood is burnt down, the flesh should be fully cooked."

The man who was playing chess, Yang Wuji, suddenly said, "No need to make my share too sodden and mashed. My teeth are strong."

Chef Hao said, "Daoist priests eat horse meat as well?"

Yang Wuji said, "Sometimes, I even eat human flesh, much less horseflesh."

Chef Hao laughed. "Priest, if you really want to eat human flesh, if you'll just wait a bit longer, there will be some ingredients here soon."

Yang Wuji said, "I have been waiting this entire time. I'm not impatient at all."

Chef Hao laughed loudly, then glanced at Fu Hongxue out of the corner of his eyes. "Human flesh enriches the blood. If you ate more human flesh, your face wouldn't be so pale."

While laughing, he lifted the more than three hundred jin heavy copper pot off the peg, then used the splintered wood from the crashed carriage to form a pile of firewood underneath the pot. The fire burned merrily, crackling and popping as the flames danced about.

The children began to cry again. Zhuo Yuzhen could only quietly open up her garments and feed them milk again.

Gongsun Tu, who was holding a wine cup in his hand, suddenly let out a breath. "What fair white skin."

Chef Hao laughed. "What tender flesh."

Ghostly Granny, who was cracking melon seeds, also let out a sigh. "What adorable children."

Fu Hongxue only felt his stomach contract. The blue veins began to bulge out on the hand he was holding his sabre with, as though he had already pulled the sabre out.

But Yan Nanfei pressed his hand down. In a low voice, he said, "You can't make your move now."

Of course, Fu Hongxue could also tell that now wasn't the time to move. Although these people were pretending to be leisurely, they were like a hornet's nest. As soon as they moved, the consequences would be unthinkable. But so what if they didn't move? If they continued to just waste time like this, would they really wait for them to eat horse flesh, then human flesh?

Yan Nanfei's voice dropped even lower. He suddenly asked, "Do you know Du Shiqi, 'Eight Lives and Eightfold Courage'?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Yan Nanfei said, "Although this man isn't a great hero, in my opinion, he has a more heroic air than any 'real' hero. I already arranged for him to meet with me in the 'Heavenly Fragrance Teahouse' of the town up ahead. So long as we can find him, anything can be accomplished. I am very good friends with him."

Fu Hongxue said, "That is your business."

Yan Nanfei said, "My business is your business."

Fu Hongxue said, "I don't know him."

Yan Nanfei said, "But he knows you."

The chess players were still playing chess. Everyone was still absorbed in their own activities, and paid them no mind at all, as though they were already dead men walking.

Yan Nanfei asked again, "Are you a very reasonable person?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Sometimes I am. Other times, I'm not."

Yan Nanfei said, "Right now, are you at the point where you can't help but be reasonable?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Seems so."

Yan Nanfei asked again, "Can Zhuo Yuzhen and her child be allowed to die?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Yan Nanfei let out a sigh. "As long as you can remember this, everything will be fine. Let's go."

Fu Hongxue said, "Go? Go where?"

Yan Nanfei said, "As soon as you hear me say the words, 'little doggy', take Zhuo Yuzhen and her children onto that wagon and hide them in the coffin. I'll handle everything else!"

He chuckled. "Don't forget, my skill in running for my life is the best in the world."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth. Naturally, he understood Yan Nanfei's meaning. Right now, he had no leeway whatsoever. No matter what, he could not allow Zhuo Yuzhen and the children to fall into these people's clutches.

On the wagon where Ghostly Granny was seated, there were four other women. Aside from her, all of them were young, and all of them weren't the slightest bit unattractive.

That is to say, they were attractive. The most attractive one was combing her hair. Her long hair was both black and gleaming.

Yan Nanfei suddenly said, "I hear that all in all, Miao Tianwang has over seventy or eighty wives."

Ghostly Granny said, "He has eighty. He likes whole numbers."

Yan Nanfei said, "I hear that no matter where he goes, he'll bring four or five of his wives with him, because at any place and at any point in time, he might have need for them."

Ghostly Granny said, "He is a vigorous and energetic man. His wives are all very fortunate."

Yan Nanfei said, "Are you one of them?"

Ghostly Granny let out a sigh. "I very much want to be, but he scorns me for being too old."

Yan Nanfei said, "Who says you are old? I think you are at least ten years younger than that old granny who is brushing her hair."

Ghostly Granny laughed loudly, while the countenance of the girl brushing her hair changed. She glared hatefully at him.

Yan Nanfei grinned towards her. "Actually, you aren't very old either. Aside from Ghostly Granny, you are the youngest one here."

By now, everyone could tell that he was causing trouble on purpose. But none of them could guess what he wanted or what he was planning. Everyone who was earlier purposefully staring away from him couldn't help but send a few glances his way.

Next, he went to Chef Hao. "Aside from cutting meat and chopping vegetables, what else is this knife of yours good for?"

Chef Hao said, "It can also kill people."

The 'vipers' on his face began to wriggle again. "There's not much of a difference between using a vegetable knife to kill people or a precious bejeweled sabre to kill people."

Yan Nanfei said, "It's a little different."

Chef Hao said, "A little different?"

Yan Nanfei ignored him. Turning around, he opened the coffin, then mumbled to himself, "I didn't expect you'd even have ground onions in here. I wonder if you have any hot peppers?"

Chef Hao loudly said, "How is it different?"

Yan Nanfei still ignored him. "Ah hah, here are the peppers. Looks like this coffin really is just like a full kitchen."

Chef Hao was originally sitting, but now he rose to his feet. "Why won't you speak? What, exactly, is the difference?"

Yan Nanfei finally turned around. Smiling, he said, "I'm not sure what the difference is, exactly, either. All I know is that 'Five Spices Horseflesh' braised in soy sauce should have some hot peppers in it."

Carrying a string of peppers, he walked to the side of the copper pot. "There's pretty much nobody who dislikes spicy food. Anyone who doesn't eat spicy food is a little doggy."

Chef Hao was so furious that his face had turned white with rage. Just at this moment, the sound of a horse neighing softly could be heard.

Fu Hongxue had already carried Zhuo Yuzhen, who was holding her children, onto the wagon!

Zhuo Yuzhen placed the children in the coffin. Fu Hongxue whipped the horses, while Yan Nanfei lifted up the frame upon which the copper pot was resting.

Gongsun Tu threw away his cup and rose. He loudly shouted, "Careful!"

Before he finished saying the word, Zhuo Yuzhen also burrowed into the coffin before covering them with the lid.

With a flip of his hand, Yan Nanfei brandished about both the metal frame and the copper pot filled with boiling hot horseflesh. With a whooshing sound, he flew towards the opposite wagon!

The boiling juice splattered everywhere. The healthy horse neighed in surprise, tipping over the wagon. The pieces of boiling hot horseflesh, along with the soup, shot out from the pot like arrows. Wherever it touched flesh, it immediately produced blisters.

Covering their faces with their clothes, the people on the wagon flew to their feet.

Fu Hongxue held his sabre with his right hand while brandishing the whip with his left. He had already charged out from within the two overturned wagons!

Xiao Siwu's body was in midair. He suddenly flipped over, concentrating all of his power in his right arm.

His flying dagger was in his right hand.

By the time Yang Wuji's body straightened, he had already seized his sword as well.

Xiao Siwu's dagger had already left his hand.

This time, he didn't make a single sound at all when he threw this dagger with all his force, and it was aimed towards Fu Hongxue's back.

Although the wagons had been overturned, the space between them wasn't very wide. Fu Hongxue needed to use all of his concentration in driving the carriage, and he didn't have eyes in his back either. He had no idea at all that this lightning bolt-like dagger had shot towards his back. Even if he knew, he couldn't turn around and dodge it. Otherwise, even if he were able to avoid the dagger, he wouldn't be able to avoid the wagons up ahead!

Just at this intolerable moment, his sabre suddenly struck out from underneath his armpit. With a clanging sound, the pitch-black scabbard suddenly gave off sparks. The four-inch long flying dagger was knocked beneath the carriage.

Yang Wuji's sword left his sheath very quickly. Like a jade maiden weaving a tapestry, he attacked from the sky.

Fu Hongxue gripped the scabbard underneath his arm. He withdrew his sabre with a backhand motion. A flash of sabre light greeted the sword light.

The sabre and the sword did not actually intersect. Although the sword light was very quick, the sabre light was even quicker. Yang Wuji's sword had already just barely touched Fu Hongxue's throat. If it went in another inch, it would have taken his life. But a miserable cry was suddenly heard and fresh blood spewed about. The sky was filled with a rain of blood. An arm suddenly fell down from the sky, with a sword still tightly gripped in it. An ancient, elegant sword of Damascus steel!

When Yang Wuji's body descended, it fell straight into that boiling hot copper pot.

In his entire life, this was the best chance he would ever have of killing Fu Hongxue. This time, his sword had almost pierced Fu Hongxue's throat.

Only, he missed by an inch.

The horse neighed loudly. The wagon was already travelling forward, past the overturned wagons. A sword light as red as crimson blood appeared, blocking off the road behind them!

Fu Hongxue did not turn his head. He heard the sound of Yan Nanfei coughing. It seemed as though Yan Nanfei used all of his energy in this sword attack to cover their retreat.

He didn't dare to turn his head. He was afraid that if he did, he would stay behind and fight shoulder-to-shoulder with Yan Nanfei in this deadly battle.

Unfortunately, some people could not be allowed to die.

They definitely could not!

A cold night. A barren grave.

A carriage came to a halt in the midst of a cluster of tombs. The stars gleamed with pulses. There was no trace of life in the wild, barren graveyard.

Someone suddenly sat upright in the coffin on the cart. She had long hair and wore a cape, and her eyes were as liquid as autumn waters. Even if she was a ghost, she was definitely a beautiful female ghost. She was more than enough to mesmerize any scholar studying late at night.

Her eyes flickered about, as though she were seeking someone. She wasn't looking for a scholar. She was looking for a man with a sabre.

Where did Fu Hongxue go? Why did he leave her here alone?

Just as fear began to appear in her eyes, Fu Hongxue appeared by her side.

A fog began to arise in the barren graveyard. The fog was pallid white, as pallid as Fu Hongxue's face.

When she saw his pallid face, although Zhuo Yuzhen let out a sigh of relief, she was still very shocked. "Why did we come here?"

Fu Hongxue didn't directly respond. Instead, he asked, "What is the safest place to hide a bag of white mice?"

Zhuo Yuzhen thought for a moment, then said, "In a large heap of white rice."

Fu Hongxue asked, "What is the best place to place a coffin, if one wants to avoid it being noticed?"



Zhuo Yuzhen finally understood his meaning. Hide white rice in the middle of a pile of rice; hide a coffin in a graveyard.

But there was something she still didn't quite understand. "Why don't we go seek out Yan Nanfei and his friend, Du Shiqi?"

Fu Hongxue said, "We cannot go."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You don't trust him?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Someone Yan Nanfei trusts, I too trust."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Then why can't you go?"

Fu Hongxue said, "The 'Heavenly Fragrance Teahouse' is a large teahouse, and Du Shiqi is a famous man. If we meet with him, Gongsun Tu will find out within six hours!"

Zhuo Yuzhen let out a sigh. In a soft voice, she said, "I didn't imagine that you are even more meticulous than I am in handling matters."

Fu Hongxue evaded her gaze. From within his bosom, he withdrew a parcel wrapped in oilpaper. "This is a baked chicken I bought on the way. No need to give me any. I've already eaten."

Zhuo Yuzhen quietly accepted it. As she opened the parcel, her tears began to fall onto the chicken.

Fu Hongxue pretended to not see her tears. "I already took a look around. There's no signs of human life within two or three li, and there's nobody following us. You must take a good nap. When dawn breaks, I need you to do something for me."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "What?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Find out where Du Shiqi sleeps at night. When I go find him, I cannot allow anyone to see me."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "We are still going to go find him?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "My appearance is too conspicuous. There's not many people who recognize you, and I know a few things about the art of disguise."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Relax. I'm not the type of weak girl who can be blown down by a gentle breeze. I can take care of myself!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Do you know how to ride horseback?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "A little!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Then go on horseback tomorrow morning. When you reach a place with people, immediately release this horse, then call for a carriage on the road. On the way back, you can buy a donkey."

The people of the north are vigorous and hardy. There were plenty of women who ride donkeys.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I will definitely be extra cautious. Only, the children..."

Fu Hongxue said, "I will take care of the children. Leave after you give them their fill of milk. Thus, you must get a good night's rest tonight."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "And you?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No need for you to worry about me. Sometimes, I can fall asleep while I am walking!"

Zhuo Yuzhen looked at him, her eyes filled with tenderness and a cherishing look, as though there were many things she wanted to say to him.

But Fu Hongxue had already turned around, facing the dark earth, as though he had already fallen asleep.

High noon.

The children had finally fallen asleep. Zhuo Yuzhen had left six hours ago.

Fu Hongxue sat in the shadow of a tomb. He stupidly stared at a tombstone in front of him. He hadn't moved in a long time.

What was he thinking about?

What type of people were buried in these tombs? How many of them were nameless heroes? How many were lonely wanderers?

If people were lonely while living, wouldn't they be even more lonely when dead?

After he died, would there be anybody to bury him? Where would he be buried?

Who can answer these questions?

Nobody!

Fu Hongxue let out a long breath. He slowly rose to his feet, and saw a donkey walk up the side of the hill.

A thin, weary donkey. An ordinary, emaciated woman.

Watching her, Fu Hongxue couldn't help but feel pride in his disguising skills.

Finally, Zhuo Yuzhen had safely returned. No one recognized her, and no one had followed her.

As soon as she saw Fu Hongxue and the children, her eyes shone. Just like every worthy mother and virtuous wife in the world, she first went over and kissed her children. Then, she took out a parcel wrapped in oilpaper. "This is the roast chicken and beef I bought at the market. No need to share it with me. I've already eaten."

Fu Hongxue quietly accepted the parcel.

Her fingertips gently brushed across his hand. His hand was ice cold.

If a person's hand was ice cold despite staying underneath a fierce sun for six hours, they must have things on their mind.

Looking at him, Zhuo Yuzhen said in a soft voice, "I know that you must have been worrying about me. So I came back as soon as I got the news."

Fu Hongxue said, "You've already find out where Du Shiqi..."

Zhuo Yuzhen interjected, "No one knows where Du Shiqi sleeps at night. Even if someone knew, they weren't willing to tell me."

Du Shiqi was definitely a person who liked making friends. Naturally, he had many friends.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "But I overheard news about something else."

Fu Hongxue was listening!

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Although he has many friends, he has quite a few enemies as well. The most fierce one amongst them is named Hu Kun. Everyone in the city knows that Hu Kun plans to kill Du Shiqi on the first day of the next month. In addition, it seems he is very assured of victory."

Fu Hongxue said, "It seems today is the twenty eighth."

Zhuo Yuzhen nodded. "So I thought to myself that Hu Kun must know more about Du Shiqi's movements these days than anyone else."

If you want to find information on someone, it is far better to seek out his enemies than his friends.

Fu Hongxue said, "Did you seek out Hu Kun?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I did not."

She smiled, then continued. "But you can go seek him out. In fact, you can go seek him out openly and brazenly, with no need to fear Gongsun Tu and the others finding out. In fact, it might be even better if they did find out."

Her smile was warm and sweet. She looked like a warm, sweet little fox.

Fu Hongxue looked at her. He suddenly understood her meaning. Admiration immediately appeared in his eyes.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "The largest teahouse isn't the 'Heavenly Fragrance Teahouse'. It is the 'Ascendant Immortal Teahouse'."

Fu Hongxue said, "Hu Kun often goes there?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "He goes there every day, almost from dawn to dusk, because he opened the 'Ascendant Immortal Teahouse'!"

After the sky darkened, Fu Hongxue left Zhuo Yuzhen and the children behind in the mountainside graveyard. How could he feel safe leaving them behind in such a ghastly, desolate, dark, terrifying place? Perhaps it was because that place was too dark, too desolate. There was definitely no one who would imagine them hiding there, and so he felt at ease.

Was he truly certain of this decision? No. But he definitely had to arrange many matters for them, so as to make sure they would live peacefully and happily. He knew that he definitely couldn't always be by their side!

No person in the world could always be by the side of another person.

No matter how long people are with one another, in the end they will separate.

If it wasn't separation caused by death, it would be separation in life.

He suddenly thought of Mingyue Xin.

He was forcing himself to be controlled this entire time, forcing himself not to think of her.

But on this unpopulated hillside, in this quiet, lonely night, the more one should not think of something, the more easy it was to think of it.

Thus, not only did he think of Mingyue Xin, he also thought of Yan Nanfei. He thought of how, when they parted, Mingyue Xin stared into his eyes. He also thought of the sound of Yan Nanfei's dry, rough coughs, and his blood red sword.

Where were they now? Were they at the ends of the world, or in a furnace?

Fu Hongxue didn't know!

He didn't even know where he was. Was he in a furnace, or at the ends of the world?

He tightly gripped his sabre. He knew that this sabre was tempered from within a furnace!

Could it be that he himself was like a sabre being tempered within a furnace?



## Chapter 14 – First Pay, Then Kill

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Hu Kun stood next to the upper railing of the ‘Ascendant Immortal Teahouse’. He felt very satisfied with everything.

This was a high class, elegant place. The decorations were beautiful, and the furnishings were exquisite, and every chair and table was made using excellent hardwood. The bowls and the cups were made from the famous Jingdezhen porcelain of Jiangnan.

The clients who came here to drink tea and wine were, generally speaking, lofty and lordly people.

Although the entrance fee here was at least twice as high as that of any other place, he knew that the customers here wouldn’t care, because that is the nature of ‘extravagance’.

Normally, he always liked to stand here. He’d watched as these noble, lordly people walk about beneath him, always making him feel as though he were above all of them.

Although he wasn’t even five feet tall, this gave him the feeling that he was a head taller than everybody else.

Thus, he liked this sort of feeling.

He also liked lofty, lordly matters, just like how he loved power.

The only thing which irritated him slightly was that fearless Du Shiqi.

When this person drank alcohol, he was fearless. When he was gambling, he was fearless. And when he was fighting, he was even more fearless, as though he really had nine lives.

“Even if he does have nine lives, I definitely cannot allow him to live past the start of next month.”

Unfortunately, he wasn't really certain that he would be victorious.

Whenever he thought of this, he would always feel a bit irritated.  
Fortunately, just at this moment, the person he was waiting for arrived.

The person he was waiting for was named Tu Qing. He had spent over thirty thousand taels of silver to invite this man to come from the capital to kill Du Shiqi.

The name 'Tu Qing' was not a very famous, well-recognized name in the martial world. This was because the things he did precluded him from becoming too famous.

He didn't want prestige. He wanted wealth.

He specialized as an assassin-for-hire. The minimum price he accepted for any mission was at least thirty thousand taels of silver.

This is an ancient, mysterious profession. A person in this profession being ostentatious or making a name for himself was a person who was breaking some cardinal rules.

But within their own circle, Tu Qing was definitely a famous man, and the price he commanded was higher than that of others.

Because he never failed to assassinate his target!

Tu Qing was seven feet tall, dark-skinned and gaunt, with a bright pair of eyes that were as keen as a hawk's.

Although the clothes he wore were form-fitting and were made from the best of materials, they weren't colorful at all.

He had a cold, quiet attitude. In his hands, he carried a dark, grey bundle that was long and narrow.

His hands were dry and steady.

All of this was very much in keeping with his status, making others feel that no matter how high a price he charged, he was be worth it!



Hu Kun appeared to be extremely satisfied as well.

Tu Qing found a seat in a corner and sat down. He didn't even raise his head up to take a single look.

His movements needed to be clandestine and secretive. He definitely could not allow others to notice any hint of a relationship between himself and Hu Kun. Even less could he allow others to find out what he was here for.

Hu Kun let out a breath. Just as he was about to return to the secret room behind him to drink two cups of celebratory wine, he suddenly saw a pale-faced man walk in. His walking posture was extremely bizarre and unusual, and he tightly gripped a sabre in his hand.

A pitch-black sabre! The sabre was still sheathed, but he himself seemed like a naked blade, ruthless and sharp.

His eyes were like the edges of a sabre as well. He glanced around the room, then his gaze fixed onto Tu Qing. Tu Qing lowered his head, drinking his tea.

There was a cold sneer playing across the lips of this stranger. He found a seat nearby and sat down.

Suddenly, with a cracking sound, an excellent wooden chair cracked underneath his weight.

He wrinkled his forehead as he supported himself with one hand on the table. Again, with a sudden cracking sound, that wooden table, worth at least twenty silver taels, was shattered into many fragments.

By now, anyone could tell that he came here to cause trouble!

Hu Kun's pupils were contracting.

Can it be that this person had also been invited here from outside, except by Du Shiqi to deal with him?

His bodyguards and hired thugs were just about to charge out, but with a gesture, Hu Kun stopped them.

He could already tell that this stranger definitely could not be handled by the likes of them!

Since Tu Qing had arrived, why not use this opportunity to display his skills?

Hu Kun was a businessman, a very intelligent businessman. Whenever he spent even a single ingot of silver, he'd expect to earn itself back.

In addition, perhaps this stranger hadn't come here for him. Perhaps he had come here for Tu Qing.

This stranger was, of course, Fu Hongxue.

Tu Qing was still drinking tea, his head lowered.

Fu Hongxue suddenly walked to him. He coldly said, "Stand up."

Tu Qing didn't move. He didn't speak either. But a majority of the other customers had already quietly slipped away by now.

Fu Hongxue repeated himself. "Stand up."

Tu Qing finally lifted up his head. He seemed to have just noticed this man. "It's more comfortable to sit than to stand. Why should I stand up?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I like your chair."

Tu Qing looked at him. He slowly put down his tea, slowly stretched out his hand, picking up the bundle on the table.

The bundle was, without a doubt, filled with his weapons.

Hu Kun's hands tightened. His heart rate suddenly sped up.

He liked to watch people kill other people. He also liked to watch people bleed.

Over the past five years, there hadn't been many things that could excite him; not even women did the trick. Killing people was the very last thing which could stimulate him. But he was disappointed.

Tu Qing rose to his feet. He picked up his bundle, then quietly stepped aside. He always acted in a very careful, prudent manner. Naturally, he wouldn't make any moves in front of so many people.

Hu Kun suddenly said, "Today, my humble shop will close early. Aside from those who have business with me, everyone else, please leave." Thus, those who wanted to watch the fun had to leave. Suddenly, only two people were left in the main hall. Tu Qing continued to sip his tea, head lowered. Fu Hongxue's head was raised, and he was staring at Hu Kun, stationed at the upper flowered railing.

Hu Kun said, "You have business with me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You are Hu Kun?"

Hu Kun nodded. He smirked. "If Du Shiqi told you to come here to kill me, you've found the right person."

Fu Hongxue said, "If you are looking for someone to kill Du Shiqi, you've found the right person as well."

Hu Kun was obviously caught off guard. "You?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I don't look like a killer?"

Hu Kun said, "You two have a feud?"

Fu Hongxue said, "It isn't necessary to be feuding with someone to kill them."

Hu Kun said, "Why do you usually kill people?"

Fu Hongxue said, "To make myself happy."

Hu Kun said, "What does it take to make you happy?"

Fu Hongxue said, "A few tens of thousands of taels of silver usually make me happy."

Light shone in Hu Kun's eyes. "I can make you happy. Will you go kill Du Shiqi for me today?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I've heard it said that you aren't a very stingy person."

Hu Kun said, "Are you certain you can kill him?" Fu Hongxue said, "I can guarantee that he won't live beyond the start of the next month."

Hu Kun laughed. "I am very happy to help my friends be happy as well. Only, I'm afraid you came a bit too late."

Fu Hongxue said, "You already found someone else?"

Hu Kun glanced at Tu Qing out of the corner of his eye, smiled, and nodded.

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "If he's the man you found, then you found the wrong man."

Hu Kun said, "Oh?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Dead men can't kill anybody."

Hu Kun said, "He's a dead man?"

Fu Hongxue said, "If he isn't a dead man, he should have killed me by now."

Hu Kun said, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because if you can't make me happy, I'll definitely go seek out Du Shiqi."

Hu Kun said, "If you seek out Du Shiqi, you'll tell him to be on guard against him."

Fu Hongxue said, "I will help Du Shiqi kill him."

Hu Kun said, "First kill him, then kill me."

Fu Hongxue said, "If Du Shiqi is alive, then you must die."

Hu Kun said, "Thus, he should kill you right now."

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, a dead man can't kill anybody!"

Hu Kun let out a sigh, then turned towards Tu Qing. "Did you hear what he just said?"

Tu Qing said, "I'm not deaf."

Hu Kun said, "Then why don't you kill him?"

Tu Qing said, "I'm not happy."

Hu Kun said, "What will it take to make you happy?"

Tu Qing said, "Fifty thousand taels."

Hu Kun appeared startled. "Du Shiqi only costs thirty thousand taels, but he costs fifty thousand?"

Tu Qing said, "Du Shiqi doesn't know me. He knows me!"

Hu Kun said, "Therefore, you can ambush Du Shiqi, but you cannot ambush him."

Tu Qing said, "In addition, he's holding a sabre. So my risk is greater."

Hu Kun said, "But you are still certain that you can kill him."

Tu Qing coldly said, "I've never missed the mark on my target!"

Hu Kun let out a sigh. "Fine. Kill him. I'll give you fifty thousand taels."

Tu Qing said, "Pay first, then kill."

Brand new thousand-tael bank notes, a total of fifty of them.

Tu Qing counted them twice, as though he were a miser. He wet his fingers with his saliva as he counted, then wrapped them up in a square cloth and stored them in the money pouch hanging off his belt.

Money which was earned through blood and sweat is always especially precious. Although he rarely sweated while earning money, he often shed blood.

Blood is naturally more valuable than sweat!

Fu Hongxue coldly watched him, no expression on his face at all. But Hu Kun smiled, and suddenly said, "You must be a very rich man already."

Tu Qing didn't deny it.

Hu Kun said, "You are married."

Tu Qing shook his head.

Hu Kun's smile became even more friendly. "Why don't you store the money here with me? I'll give you interest, three percent interest."

Tu Qing shook his head again.

Hu Kun said, "You aren't willing? Can it be that you distrust me?"

Tu Qing coldly said, "The only person I trust is myself."

He patted his money pouch. "All of my money is here. There's only one way it can be taken!"

Hu Kun naturally did not dare to ask, but the look in his eyes as good as asked, "What way?"

Tu Qing said, "By killing me!"

He stared at Hu Kun. "This belongs to whoever kills me. Would you like to give it a try?"

Hu Kun laughed. His laughter was very forced. "You know I won't try, because..."

Tu Qing coldly said, "Because you don't have that much courage."

He suddenly turned towards Fu Hongxue. "How about you? If I kill you, is there anything which you will leave behind for me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Only a lesson."

Tu Qing said, "What lesson?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Don't keep the weapon with which you kill people wrapped inside a bundle. A person who intends to kill others, as well as a person who is about to be killed, is impatient. They won't wait for you to unwrap your bundle."

Tu Qing said, "That is a very good lesson. I will keep it in my mind at all times."

He suddenly laughed. "Actually, I'm also an impatient sort of person. If I had to unwrap my bundle in order to kill people, I'd go crazy with impatience."

He finally stretched out his hands and unwrapped his bundle. What sort of weapon was in that bundle?

Hu Kun really wanted to see what weapon he used. His gaze unconsciously affixed itself upon it.

Who would have thought that before the bundle was unwrapped, Tu Qing already made his move. His weapons for killing weren't hidden within the bundle. His entire body, from top to bottom, was covered with weapons. With a clinging sound, seven cold rays of light shot out from his waist and his clothes. From the back of his collar shot out three flowery crossbow bolts. Two iron lotus flowers flew out from his hands. Two sharp knives shot out from the tip of his boots as well.

\* [An iron lotus flower is an ancient Chinese weapon which looks like a flying claw; a flexible metal chain attached to an iron claw.]

As soon as the hidden projectile weapons flew out, he jumped up into the air, both legs striking out in rapid succession. In the blink of an eye, he had used four different types of lethal weapons. That eye-grabbing bundle of his was still placed on the table. This was truly outside of other people's expectations. Even Hu Kun was greatly shocked. This technique alone was worth him spending fifty thousand taels of silver for.

He was certain that Tu Qing wouldn't miss his mark this time either. But he was wrong, because he did not know that this pallid faced stranger was Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue had already pulled out his sabre.

A sabre without equal in all the world. Unimaginable, unthinkable sabre techniques.

No matter how vile the hidden projectile might be, or how devious the plot, once they met with this sabre, it was as though ice and snow had met the sunlight.

A flash of sabre light. A series of light clinking sounds, like small golden bells being sounded. All the hidden projectiles in the air fell to the floor. Every single one of them had been cut in half, right down the middle. Even a master craftsman using a carving knife to slowly whittle away at them might not be able to make such neat, perfect cuts.

Only after the sabre light disappeared could the blood be seen. Blood, flowing down from the face!

Tu Qing's face.

A sabre cut had been left on his face, carving down from the middle of his eyebrows, all the way down to his nose. If thirty percent more force had been used in that chop, without question his head would have been split in two as well.

The sabre was already sheathed again.

Fresh blood flowed down from his nose. It entered his mouth, tasting hot, salty, and bitter. Every single muscle on Tu Qing's face had become contorted with pain, but his body didn't move. He knew that his career as an assassin had just come to an end.

This was a secretive line of work. One must silently, invisibly kill his target, then silently, invisibly disappear.

Nobody who had such a sabre wound on his face could be suited for this line of work.

Fu Hongxue stared at the sabre wound. He suddenly waved his hand. "You, go."



Tu Qing's lips were twitching as well. "Where shall I go?"

Fu Hongxue said, "So long as you don't kill others, you can go anywhere you wish."

Tu Qing said, "You...why aren't you killing me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You insisted on fifty thousand taels before you would kill me. For me to kill you, I would at least demand fifty thousand taels as well."

He coldly continued, "I've never killed for free either."

Tu Qing said, "But I have more than merely fifty thousand taels on me. If you killed me, they would belong to you."

Fu Hongxue said, "That's another matter entirely. I adhere to the same rule; first get paid, then kill."

Rules are founded on principles.

Regardless of the nature of one's profession, if one wishes to be successful, one must follow their principles.

Tu Qing no longer opened his mouth. He silently removed two stacks of bank notes from his money pouch, a total of fifty notes.

Once again, he carefully counted the notes twice, then placed them on the table. Lifting his head up, he glanced at Hu Kun. "This is still yours."

Hu Kun was coughing.

Tu Qing said, "You can give him fifty thousand taels and tell him to kill me."

Hu Kun suddenly stopped coughing. "How much more do you have on you?"

Tu Qing closed his mouth.

Hu Kun stared at him. Light shone in his eyes.

Tu Qing had already lifted up the bundle on the table, and was slowly heading out!

Hu Kun suddenly said loudly, "Kill him, I'll pay fifty thousand taels."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "If you want to kill this person, you have to make the move yourself."

Hu Kun asked, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because he is already injured. He no longer has the capability to defend himself."

Hu Kun's two hands tightened on the railing. With a thudding sound, three flying daggers slammed into the wooden railing.

The flying daggers came from Tu Qing's bundle. The bundle was filled with weapons as well.

Tu Qing coldly said, "I never kill people for free, but for you, I am willing to break this rule and make an exception. Do you want to try me?"

Hu Kun's face had changed long ago.

He really could not guess how many more weapons remained in the bundle, and how many more remained on Tu Qing's person!

But he could already tell that regardless of what type of hidden projectiles Tu Qing might use, all that Tu Qing needed was a single one in order to kill him.

Tu Qing finally left. As he reached the doorway, he suddenly turned around and stared at Fu Hongxue, then stared at Fu Hongxue's sabre. It was as though he had never seen a person like this, never seen a sabre like this.

He suddenly asked, "Your honorable surname?"

Fu Hongxue said, "My surname is Fu."

Tu Qing said, "Fu Hongxue."

Fu Hongxue said, "Correct."

Tu Qing lightly sighed. "Actually, I should have thought of the possibility that it was you long ago."

Fu Hongxue said, "But you didn't think?"

Tu Qing said, "I didn't dare to think."

Fu Hongxue said, "Didn't dare?"

Tu Qing said, "If a person thinks too much, he won't kill people anymore."

It was dark outside already. There were no stars, no moon. As soon as Tu Qing left, he disappeared into the darkness.

Hu Kun let out a long sigh, then mumbled to himself, "Why didn't you kill him? Aren't you afraid that he will reveal your secret?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I have no secret."

Hu Kun said, "Are you no longer interested in killing Du Shiqi?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Killing people isn't a secret."

Hu Kun let out a sigh. "There are eighty thousand taels worth of bank notes on the table. Kill Du Shiqi, and they will be yours."

Fu Hongxue said, "First pay, then kill."

Hu Kun forced out a laugh. "You can take them away now."

Fu Hongxue took the bank notes, also counting them twice, before slowly asking, "Do you know where Du Shiqi is right now?"

Hu Kun naturally knew. "In order to discover his whereabouts, I've spent fifteen thousand taels."

Fu Hongxue lightly said, "Killing someone was always a very wasteful thing."

Hu Kun let out a sigh. He watched as he put the bank notes into his clothes, then suddenly asked, "Killing people isn't a secret?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No!"

Hu Kun said, "You aren't afraid of killing in front of a multitude of people?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Killing can be done at any place."

Hu Kun laughed, he really laughed. "Then you can go find him right now."

Fu Hongxue said, "Where is he?"

Hu Kun narrowed his eyes. "Going all out."

Fu Hongxue said, "Going all out?"

Hu Kun said, "Going all out, gambling-wise, alcohol-wise. I can only hope that he hasn't yet lost everything, and that he hasn't yet drunk himself to death."

Not only was Du Shiqi winning, he was very sober as well.

Whenever a person is winning, he is always very sober. Only losers will be muddle-headed.

He was in the middle of shuffling the cards.

Thirty two wooden domino cards. Each and every one, he seemed to control. Even the dice seemed to be obeying his commands.

He wasn't playing any tricks or using any sleight of hand. When a person's gambling luck came upon him, there is no need at all to cheat.

Earlier, he had used a 'long thirteen' card and taken money from everyone at the table. By now, it seemed as though he had won twenty thousand taels. Originally, he definitely could have won some more.

Unfortunately, the people playing with him had gradually diminished, because everyone's money-pouch was now empty.

He hoped that one or two fresh faces would enter. Just at this moment, he saw a stranger with an ashen face walk in.

Fu Hongxue was watching him shuffle the cards. His hands were enormous and very strong.

Du Shiqi took the part of the bank again. Out of four hands, he won everybody's money on two of them, but only made a total of two hundred or so taels.

Everybody else at his table seemed to be without vitality already.

In a casino, money is blood. How could people without blood have vitality?

Did this stranger with such a pale face have a flourishing flow of blood in his veins?

Du Shiqi suddenly raised up his head and smiled at him. "Friend, would you like to play a few rounds as well?"

Fu Hongxue coldly stared at him. "Just one hand."

Du Shiqi said, "Only one hand? Victory or defeat, to be determined in one hand, then?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Right!"

Du Shiqi laughed. "Great! Only this sort of gambling is really fun."

He straightened his waist. All of the joints in his body immediately cracked, and all of the muscles underneath his robe moved hither and to without stopping.

This was the result of eighteen years of bitter training!

He was eight feet, two inches tall. He had large shoulders, but a slender waist. Supposedly, he could snap a cow's head with one hand. Everyone who saw him couldn't help but gaze upon him with awe and veneration, as though they were officials gazing upon the emperor.

The eighty bank notes had already been taken out. Brand new bank notes, in a pale white hand.

Du Shiqi said, "How much do you have?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Eighty thousand."

Du Shiqi let out a light breath. His eyes were so bright, it was as though two torches had been lit in them. "Eighty thousand taels on one hand?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Regardless of who wins, only one hand."

Du Shiqi said, "Unfortunately, I don't have that much."

Fu Hongxue said, "No harm."

Du Shiqi said, "By no harm, do you mean that isn't a problem?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Du Shiqi laughed. "Did you steal this money? Is that why you don't care?"

Fu Hongxue said, "They weren't stolen. They were used to purchase a life!"

Du Shiqi said, "Whose life?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yours!"

The smile on Du Shiqi's face froze. Everybody nearby had clenched their fists. Some had clenched their sabres.

But Fu Hongxue didn't even glance at him. "If I lose, these eighty thousand taels are yours. If you lose, you must leave with me."

Du Shiqi said, "Why must I leave with you?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I don't want to kill you here."

Du Shiqi laughed again, but his laughter was very forced. "If you lose, are you still going to kill me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No matter what, I must kill you."

Du Shiqi said, "What you seem to be saying is that regardless of who wins, we'll still stake our lives and fight each other. Only, there are too many

people here, all of whom are my people, and so you want to fight elsewhere.”

Fu Hongxue coldly said, “I don’t want to kill too many people.”

Du Shiqi laughed. “You seem to be certain that you can kill me.”

Fu Hongxue said, “If I wasn’t certain, why would I come?”

Du Shiqi laughed loudly.

Fu Hongxue said, “Eighty thousand taels of silver can be used for many things. After you die, your friends and brothers can use them!”

Suddenly, a knife chopped out from behind them, aimed at the back of his head.

Fu Hongxue didn’t leave, but Du Shiqi had already seized the hand wielding that knife.

With a clanging sound, the knife dropped to the floor. With a cracking sound, the blade of the knife split.

Du Shiqi’s face sunk. In a fierce voice, he said, “This affair has nothing to do with any of you. You are only allowed to watch, not to interfere.”

No one dared to move.

Du Shiqi laughed again. “You are all my good brothers. First watch me win these eighty thousand taels of silver.”

With one pull, he tugged open his jacket, revealing his copper-like chest. “How shall we gamble?”

Fu Hongxue said, “You choose!”

Du Shiqi said, “We’ll play Pai Gow. One flip of the cards, two eyes staring at it. This way is the best.”

Fu Hongxue said, “Fine.”

Du Shiqi said, "Shall we still use this set of cards?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Du Shiqi blinked his eyes. "Do you know how many matches I've won with this set of domino cards?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Du Shiqi said, "I've won over sixty hands. My luck is extremely good with this set of domino cards."

Fu Hongxue said, "Even the best of luck will have to turn at some point."

Du Shiqi stared at him. "You are self-assured when it comes to killing. You are certain of winning in gambling as well?"

Fu Hongxue lightly said, "If I wasn't certain, why would I gamble?"

Du Shiqi laughed loudly. "This time, you're wrong. When it comes to gambling, not even divinities can be certain. In the past, I've also seen many people like you who were certain of winning. By now, they've all so lost so much that they've hung themselves."

The thirty two domino cards were divided into four rows, with eight cards in each row.

Du Shiqi pushed out one row. "There's only the two of us gambling, and both of us are starting with a blank slate."

Fu Hongxue said, "I understand."

Du Shiqi said, "So we should gamble with four cards."

Fu Hongxue said, "Fine."

Du Shiqi pushed forwards four cards with two fingers. "If the dice roll is odd, the first set of cards is yours."

Fu Hongxue said, "You shuffled the cards. I'll roll the dice."



Du Shiqi said, "Fine."

Fu Hongxue picked up the dice. Casually, he tossed them out.

Seven. Odd.

Du Shiqi said, "I'll take the second set."

Two sets of wooden domino cards. With a cracking sound, they came together, then separated.

Light shone in Du Shiqi's eyes. A smile appeared on his lips. His friends all let out a breath as well.

Everyone could tell that he had a very good set of cards.

Fu Hongxue only coldly said, "You lose."

Du Shiqi said, "How do you know that I've lost? Do you know what cards I am holding?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You have a 'heaven' card, and a 'human' card, forming a 'Heaven's Bar'."

Astonished, Du Shiqi stared at him. "Did you look at your own cards?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head. "I don't need to look. My cards form a 'Mixed Five'."

Du Shiqi couldn't help but reveal his cards. He really did have a 'Mixed Five'.

'Mixed Five' just so happened to defeat 'Heaven's Bar'.

Du Shiqi was stunned. Everyone was stunned.

And then, there was a commotion. "This brat must have cheated. He marked the cards."

Fu Hongxue smirked. "Who do these cards belong to?"

Du Shiqi said, "Mine."

Fu Hongxue said, "Have I touched the cards at all?"

Du Shiqi said, "No."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then how could I have cheated?"

Du Shiqi let out a sigh. He smiled bitterly. "You didn't cheat. I'll go with you."

Another commotion.

Those who gripped their daggers earlier wanted to use their sabres again. Those clenching their fists once more wanted to punch out.

Du Shiqi said in a fearsome voice, "Although I've lost at gambling money, I haven't lost yet in gambling lives. What are you guys kicking up a racket about?"

The disturbance immediately calmed. No one dared to open their mouths.

Du Shiqi laughed again, and his laughter was still very cheerful. "Actually, you should all know that I definitely won't lose when it comes to gambling lives."

Fu Hongxue said, "You are certain of yourself?"

Du Shiqi smiled. "Even if I'm not certain, I have nine lives. At most, you can only take one away."

No stars. No moon. No lanterns.

Du Shiqi suddenly let out a sigh. "Actually, I don't have nine lives. I don't have a single life at all."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Du Shiqi said, "My life is already Yan Nanfei's."

Fu Hongxue said, "You know who I am?"

Du Shiqi nodded. "I owe him a life, and he owes you a life. I'm willing to pay you back for him."

He stopped for a moment. His face was still carrying a smile. "I only hope you'll let me know one thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "What is it?"

Du Shiqi said, "How did you recognize the cards?"

Fu Hongxue didn't directly respond. Instead, he asked, "Do you know that every person has a fingerprint on their fingers?"

Du Shiqi said, "Yes, I do. Some have 'circle' fingerprints, other have 'whorl' fingerprints."

Fu Hongxue said, "Do you know that no two fingerprints are alike in all the world?"

Du Shiqi did not know that.

At that time, nobody knew things like that.

He bitterly laughed, "I rarely look at people's hands, especially men's hands."

Fu Hongxue said, "Even if you often look at other's hands, you wouldn't be able to tell. The differences are very minute."

Du Shiqi said, "But you can tell?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Even if two biscuits were made using the very exact same mould, I would be able to tell them apart."

Du Shiqi sighed. "That must be a natural talent."

Fu Hongxue dully said, "Right. It is a natural talent. Only, this is a natural talent that was practiced in a secret room without the slightest hint of light."

Du Shiqi said, "How long did you train for?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I only practiced for seventeen years, for only six to ten hours a day."

Du Shiqi said, "Did you train your sabre skills in the same way?"

Fu Hongxue said, "When you are training your eyesight, you must always grip your sabre. Otherwise, you will fall asleep."

Du Shiqi forced out a laugh. "Only now do I realize the true meaning of the words 'natural talent'."

The real meaning of 'natural talent' is 'bitter training'. Bitter training without pause.

Fu Hongxue said, "That set of dominoes was made using wood, and the wood had its own grainy patterns. Every single pattern was different. I watched you shuffle the cards twice. There isn't a single one of those thirty two cards which I don't recognize."

Du Shiqi said, "But if that set of dice came out odd, wouldn't you have lost?"

Fu Hongxue said, "That set of dice definitely wouldn't have come out odd."

Du Shiqi said, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue dully said, "Because I am a natural talent at casting dice as well."

They had already arrived at the end of the long alleyway. The streets outside were even darker.

The night was now very deep.

Fu Hongxue suddenly jumped onto a roof, the highest roof. Every dark nook and cranny was within his eyesight.

He didn't kill people for others to watch. This couldn't be seen by others either.

Du Shiqi finally caught up with him. "What, exactly, do you want me to do?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I want you to die!"

Du Shiqi said, "You really want me to die?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You are already a dead man."

Du Shiqi didn't understand.

Fu Hongxue said, "Starting now, you need to be dead for at least a year."

Du Shiqi thought for a while. It seemed as though he somewhat understood, but still didn't fully understand.

Fu Hongxue said, "I've even prepared the coffin for you. It's at the graveyard just outside of the city."

Du Shiqi blinked. "Are there some other things in the coffin?"

Fu Hongxue said, "There's three other people."

Du Shiqi said, "Three people?"

Fu Hongxue said, "But many people don't want for them to continue on living."

Du Shiqi said, "Are you going to make sure that they continue to live?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "So I must help them find a safe, secret place. I cannot let anyone find them."

Du Shiqi's gaze slowly brightened. "And so I'll take the coffin back and arrange a glorious funeral for myself."

Fu Hongxue said, "You must die, because no one will think to ask a dead man about their whereabouts."

Du Shiqi said, "In addition, you're the one who killed me. Everyone will believe that you made an arrangement with Hu Kun, that you will kill me in exchange for him protecting them."

By now, he finally understood. This was actually a simple matter. Only, Fu Hongxue was executing it in a very complicated way.

Fu Hongxue said, "I must be extremely cautious. They are simply too sinister and evil."

Du Shiqi said, "Who, exactly, are 'they'?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yang Wuji, Xiao Siwu, Gongsun Tu, and a 'Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch'."

He didn't say Gongzi Yu's name. He didn't want to shock Du Shiqi too much.

But the names of these four men was already more than enough to shock even someone with eight times as much courage as an ordinary man.

Du Shiqi gazed fixedly at him. "They want to deal with you. Naturally, you won't let them off easy either."

Fu Hongxue didn't deny that either.

Du Shiqi suddenly let out a sigh. "I'm not afraid of them, because I'm already a dead man. A dead man need fear no one. But you..."

Fu Hongxue didn't deny it.

Du Shiqi said, "After you handle the affairs here, are you going to go find them?"

He looked at Fu Hongxue, then looked at that black sabre. He suddenly chuckled. "Perhaps the one who should be afraid isn't you, but them. One year from today, perhaps they will all be dead men as well."

Fu Hongxue's gaze was distant. His person seemed to be distant as well.

All around them was darkness, far off into the distance.

After a long time, he slowly said, "Sometimes, I wish I had nine lives as well. To deal with people like them, one life really is too few."

A bleak and desolate mountain valley. Barren and infertile soil.

There were only ten or so households in the mountain village. At the base of the mountain there was a small house, with a bamboo and chrysanthemum garden.

From far away, Du Shiqi looked at the chrysanthemums beneath the bamboo stand. His eyes seemed to be filled with tenderness.

Once he arrived here, it seemed as though he had turned into one of the honest, unsophisticated farmers.

It seemed as though Fu Hongxue's heart was sighing with emotion as well.

He just left the small house. Zhuo Yuzhen and the children were sleeping.

Sleep peacefully. There's definitely no one who will find you here.

What about you? Are you leaving?

I'm not leaving. I'll be staying here a few days as well.

He very rarely lied, but this time he really did lie.

He couldn't not lie, because he couldn't not leave. Since he must leave, why cause unnecessary pain?

Fu Hongxue lightly sighed. "This is a good place. A person who is able to peacefully live out his life here must be a person of great bliss indeed."

Du Shiqi squeezed out a smile. "I grew up here. Originally, I could have been a very blissful person as well."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then, why did you leave?"

Du Shiqi was silent. After a long time, he suddenly asked, "Did you see those chrysanthemums beneath that patch of bamboo?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Du Shiqi said, "A little girl planted it. A little girl with big eyes and long hair."

Fu Hongxue said, "Where is she now?"

Du Shiqi did not reply. He did not need to reply. The tears in his eyes spoke everything on his behalf.

The chrysanthemums were still there, but the one who had planted them was gone.

After another long period of time, he slowly said, "Actually, I should have come here to keep her company long ago. She must have been very lonely these past few years."

When people died, would they still be as lonely as before?

Fu Hongxue took out that stack of bank notes. He gave them to Du Shiqi. "Hu Kun wanted to use these to purchase your life. No matter how you all use it, you need have no regrets."

Du Shiqi said, "Why don't you give them to her personally? Are you leaving now?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Du Shiqi said, "Aren't you going to bid her farewell?"

Fu Hongxue dully said, "Since I am going to leave, why say farewell?"

Du Shiqi said, "For you to have done so much for her, she must be very dear to you. At least, you should..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted him. "You've done many things for me, but you aren't a dear one to me."

Du Shiqi said, "But I am a friend."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "I have no dear ones, and I have no friends."

The sun was setting in the west. It was sunset again.

Fu Hongxue strode beneath the setting sun. His footsteps did not stop, but grew slower, as though he had suddenly begun carrier a heavy burden on his shoulder.

Did he really have no dear ones, no friends?



Du Shiqi saw his solitary back disappear into the distance. He suddenly loudly said, "I forgot to tell you something. Hu Kun is dead already. He was hung to death by someone with a rope at the top banister of the 'Ascendant Immortal Teahouse'."

Fu Hongxue didn't turn his head. "Who killed him?"

Du Shiqi said, "Don't know. Nobody knows. I only know that the person who killed him left behind two sentences."

Those two sentences were left behind using fresh blood: "This is my first time killing someone for free. It is also the last time I kill someone."

The setting sun became even dimmer, but Fu Hongxue's eyes suddenly shone with light.

Tu Qing finally put down his knife. His butcher's knife.

If this sort of person made up his mind about something, he definitely would not change.

But I...don't I, too, hold a butcher's knife in my hand? When can I put it down?

Fu Hongxue tightly gripped his sabre. The light in his eyes dimmed.

He couldn't put down this sabre yet. If people such as Gongsun Tu were still alive in the world, he couldn't put down this sabre!

He definitely could not!

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## Chapter 15 – The Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon

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High noon. Sunlight filled the sky.

When Fu Hongxue left the inn, he felt as though his spirit was reinvigorated, and that he was capable of dealing with any problems or dangers.

He had slept for an entire day, then rested in a warm bath for an hour. His exhaustion, accumulated over many days, had been washed clean like the dirt and grime.

Over the past few years, he had very rarely pulled out his sabre. He felt that using the sabre to solve problems wasn't necessarily the best way to handle things.

But now his thinking had changed, and so he had to stir himself to vigor.

Because not only was killing very extravagant and wasteful, it was also something which required sufficient energy and vitality.

Right now, although he didn't know where those people were, he was confident that he would definitely find clues to their whereabouts.

Zheng Jin was a woodcutter, twenty one years of age, unmarried, and lived in a small wooden cabin in the mountains. Every day, he only left the mountain once, to exchange dry firewood for salt, rice, fatty meat, and alcohol. Once in a while, he would also go to one of the dark alleyways of the city to find a cheap, low-cost girl.

The firewood he cut was always sold to the teahouses by the major avenues. His firewood was both dry and cheap, and so the teahouse managers would always keep him for some tea before letting him leave. Sometimes he himself would buy a kettle of wine as well.

Even when he drank, though, he rarely opened his mouth. He wasn't a very talkative person.

But on this rainy day, he was very fond of telling a story, the same story each time. He had told it at least twenty or thirty times.

Every time he told the story, he would always emphasize this at the beginning: "This is an absolutely true story. I witnessed it myself. Otherwise, I wouldn't believe it either."

The story happened three days ago, at noon. It started from the flash of sabre light which he saw within the forest.

"Even in your dreams, you could never have imagined that there was such a sabre. With just a flash of sabre light, a vigorous and flourishing horse was suddenly chopped into two halves."

"I saw a young man who looked like he was a playboy from a rich family, with a sword as bright red as fresh blood. No matter who he touched with his sword, that person would immediately fall down."

"He also had a friend, with a pale face and black hair. His face was so white, it looked translucent."

"This man was even more fearsome..."

Although he had told the same story over twenty or thirty times, he still told the story with gusto, and the listeners still heard the story with relish.

But this time, he actually shut his mouth before he finished the story, because he suddenly realized that the ashen-faced man was standing right in front of him. A pair of eyes, as sharp as a knife blade, were staring at him.

A pitch-black sabre. A pair of lightning-like eyes. A rain of blood which shot out like arrows...

Zheng Jin only felt his stomach began to contract and twitch again, as though he was almost about to begin vomiting anew.

He wanted to flee, but his two legs just so happened to go soft.

Fu Hongxue watched him coldly. He suddenly said, "Continue."

Zheng Jin forced a smile to his face. "Continue...continue what?"

Fu Hongxue said, "That day, what did you see happen after I left?"

Zheng Jin wiped away his sweat. "I saw many things, but I didn't see anything clearly."

He wasn't totally lying. At the time, he really was so frightened that he almost fainted.

Fu Hongxue only wanted to know one thing. "What happened to that man who wielded the red sword?"

Zheng Jin replied very quickly this time. "He died."

Fu Hongxue's hands tightened, and his heart sank. His entire body was already ice cold. Only after a long time did he open his mouth again. "How did he die? Who killed him?"

Zheng Jin said, "Originally, he wasn't going to die. After he sent the carriage off, he warded off three people for you. It seemed as though nobody else dared to face his sword, so he also found an opportunity to flee. He moved really quickly, as though he were a gust of wind."

As he retold the story, in his heart he was reliving that memory. His features went through many transformations as well.

But he spoke very quickly, because he was very familiar with telling this story. "But just as he fled into the forest, that horse-butchering sabre light suddenly flew out again. Although he dodged the first chop, the man followed with a second chop, and each chop was faster than the previous.

He didn't continue, nor did he need to continue, because everyone already knew the end to this story!

In front was the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch. Behind him was Gongsun Tu and Xiao Siwu. No matter who was caught in this situation, the result would be the same.

Fu Hongxue was silent. Although he looked very tranquil, in his heart, he felt as though a thousand soldiers and ten thousand cavalry troops were stampeding about.

The bright moon had sunk down. The swallow had flown away, never to be seen again as well.

He was silent for a long time, before asking, "What type of person was he?"

Zheng Jin said, "He really looked as though he were a divinity, like he was the prince of hell. He was at least a head taller than everybody present. He wore a golden hoop in his ears, and wore clothes made from animal skins. The sabre he wielded in his hands was at least seven or eight feet long.

Fu Hongxue said, "Afterwards?"

Zheng Jin said, "That 'chef' fellow originally wanted to chop your friend apart and boil him in the pot, but the man who was originally playing chess was totally opposed to this. Afterwards..."

He let out a breath, then continued. "Afterwards, they gave your friend's corpse to a monk from the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon."

Fu Hongxue immediately asked, "Where is the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon?"

Zheng Jin said, "I hear it's at the northern gate, but I've never gone before. Very few people go there!"

Fu Hongxue said, "They gave him to which monk?"

Zheng Jin said, "It seems that monastery only has one monk. He's a crazy monk. I hear that he..."

Fu Hongxue said, "What about him?"

A pained look was on Zheng Jin's face, as though he were about to vomit again. "I hear that not only is he crazy, he also likes to eat flesh. Human flesh."

The sunlight was as scorching as fire, making the road as hot as a furnace.

Fu Hongxue silently strode upon the furnace. He didn't sweat a single drop of sweat. He didn't shed a single tear.

The only thing he had left was blood.

"When I can ride a carriage, I will never walk. I hate walking!"

He was just the opposite of Yan Nanfei. When he could walk, he would never ride a carriage!

He seemed to want to intentionally torment his two legs, because these two legs brought him too much trouble and misery.

"Sometimes I can even fall asleep while I'm walking."

Right now, he naturally wouldn't fall asleep. There was a very strange look in his eyes. It wasn't a look of grief, or of rage. It was a look of uncertainty and pondering.

And then he suddenly turned around, heading back to where he came from!

What did he suddenly think of?

Could it be that there were things he still hadn't thought through, and so he must go back and speak to that woodcutter again?

But Zheng Jin was already no longer at the teahouse.

"He just left." The teahouse manager said, "Over the past two days, he was always here telling that story. He always stayed here until it was dark. But today, he left particularly early."

He clearly felt some dread towards this pale-faced stranger, and so he spoke very carefully and very precisely. "And he left in a big hurry, as though he had pressing business to attend to."

"What road did he take?"

The manager pointed to a road up ahead. There was a flattering yet obscene smile on his face. "His old mistress seems to live on that street. I think her name is Peach. He must have gone to look for her."

A dark, dirty, and narrow alleyway. A foul stench emanated from the gutter. Trash was stacked everywhere.

Fu Hongxue didn't seem to notice at all.

Light shone in his eyes. The blue veins on the hand with which he gripped his sabre were bulging out, as though he was very excited, very agitated.

What, exactly, did he think of?

From behind a tattered wooden door, a woman wearing a string of jasmine flowers suddenly walked out.

The perfume and makeup were all cheap. They mixed together with the vile stench of the alleyway to form an evil, degrading lure.

She intentionally brought her heavily made up face close to Fu Hongxue. Her hands had already quietly reached out, intentionally stroking a certain place on Fu Hongxue's upper thigh.

"There's a bed inside. It's both soft and comfortable. There's also me and a basin of warm water. It only costs two silvers."

She narrowed her eyes, revealing lascivious laughter in them. "I'm only seventeen, but I am very skilled. I'm even better than Peach."

Her laughter was very cheerful. She felt that this transaction was already successful.

Because a certain part of this man's anatomy had already changed.

Fu Hongxue's pallid face suddenly turned red. Not only did he want to vomit, he was also furious. Even in front of such a base, cheap woman, he still wasn't able to control his physiological reactions.

Was this because it had been too long since he had been intimate with a woman, or because he was already very excited?

No matter what type of excitement one might have, it easily leads to arousal.

The body of the woman wearing a jasmine flower moved even closer to him. Her two hands were moving more quickly as well.

Fu Hongxue's hand suddenly struck out, heavily striking her across the face. She collapsed, hitting the wooden door, falling face-up to the ground.

The surprising thing was, there wasn't a look of anger or surprise on her face. There was a look of exhaustion, sorrow, and despair.

She had long since become accustomed to this sort of humiliation. Her anger had long since turned into numbness. What made her sorrowful was that once more, the transaction was not successful.

Where would her dinner come from tonight? A strand of jasmine flowers wouldn't fill her stomach.

Fu Hongxue turned his head away, not bearing to look at her. He brought out all the silver on his body, forcefully casting them to her.

"Tell me, where is Peach?"

"She's at the very last right-handed house."

The jasmine flowers had already fallen. She crawled about on the floor, picking up those silver pieces. She didn't give Fu Hongxue another look.

Fu Hongxue began to walk away. He only took a few steps before he bent his waist and vomited.

In the entire alleyway, only this door appeared attractive and dignified. Not even the lacquer had peeled off.

It seemed that not only was Peach very skilled, her business was very good as well.

It was very quiet inside. There was no sound.

A young, vigorous man and a woman with very brisk business who were together in a room shouldn't be so quiet.



Although the door was locked, it wasn't latched too firmly. A woman in this line of work didn't necessarily need to latch her door too tightly, just like how they definitely didn't need a tight belt.

He pushed open the door. The living room was in front of them. It was also their bedroom. The walls looked as though they had just been whitewashed as well. It was filled with all sorts of unimaginable pictures.

A large bouquet of withered camellias were held within a teapot on the table. Next to the teapot was a bowl of half-eaten pork noodles.

Aside from a large, embroidered bed, the most lavish thing in the room was an ancestral tablet placed at the head of the bed. The engravings were exquisite, and the yellow curtains were noble. It formed an extremely strong contrast with the lewd, lascivious paintings on the walls.

Why would she put an ancestral tablet at the head of the bed.

Did she want these spirits to personally witness how lowly and despicable humans were? Witness her sell herself? Witness her die?

Peach was already dead. She lay dead on the bed, along with Zheng Jin. Their fresh blood dyed the embroidered red blankets even more crimson.

The blood was flowing from the major arteries in the back of their necks. One chop took their lives.

Not only did the killer have a quick sabre, he also had plentiful experiences.

Fu Hongxue wasn't startled. Could it be that he had already predicted all of this?

Why would a man who normally didn't speak too much, stay in a teahouse all day and tell stories without even chopping wood anymore?

He drank, ate meat, and \*\*\*\*\*d. Naturally, he couldn't have too many savings.

Then after not working for two days, how could he afford to visit Peach?

In addition, he was too familiar with that story, and told it too brilliantly, to the point where even the expressions on his face worked in concert with it, as though he had long since been used to it.

The conclusion one should reach from these clues were very obvious!

He intentionally stayed behind at the most populous teahouse to tell stories, for the sole purpose of Fu Hongxue seeking him out.

Gongsun Tu and the rest gave him money to tell lies for Fu Hongxue to hear.

So now, they killed him to shut his mouth.

But even if these conclusions were totally accurate, a few problems still existed.

Which parts of the story he told was true? Which parts were false? Why did they want him to tell those lies? Was it to cover up the identity of the true killer of Yan Nanfei? Or was it to get Fu Hongxue to go to the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon?

Fu Hongxue couldn't be sure. But he had already made his mind up. Even if the monastery was a deadly ambush, he had to go no matter what.

Just at this moment, that naked woman lying in the middle of the puddle of the blood suddenly flew up. She withdrew a dagger from behind her pillow, thrusting it towards his chest.

Someone scurried out from the closet behind him as well. He wielded a silver spear, and thrust it, serpent-like, towards his back.

This was definitely a totally unexpected act.

Zheng Jin was really dead. No one would have imagined that the dead girl by his side was actually alive.

And even less might one imagine that her strikes were vicious and evil, and as quick as lightning.

Fu Hongxue didn't move, nor did he dodge her dagger. He didn't need to dodge at all.

Just at this moment, there was suddenly a dagger flash from outside. It flew past the right side of the neck of the silver-speared assassin, then nailed itself into the throat of the naked female.

Fresh blood spewed forth like an arrow from the neck of the silver-speared assassin. Just as that woman's body rose up, it fell back down again.

With the single flash of a dagger, the lives and souls of two people were taken away.

Fresh blood sprayed down like rain.

Fu Hongxue slowly turned around. He saw Xiao Siwu.

He had another dagger in his hands. This time, he wasn't pruning his nails. He was just coldly staring at Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "One dagger, two lives. Good dagger!"

Xiao Siwu said, "Was it truly good?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Good!"

Xiao Siwu turned around and took two steps away. He suddenly turned his head and said, "Naturally, you could tell that I didn't want to kill you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Xiao Siwu said, "I just wanted you to look at my dagger again."

Fu Hongxue said, "I already saw it just now!"

Xiao Siwu said, "You've already seen me strike three times, and two of those times it was directed towards you. With regards to my attacks, there's already nobody else in the world who can see my attacks more clearly."

Fu Hongxue said, "Very probably."

Xiao Siwu said, "Ye Kai is your friend. Naturally, you've seen him strike as well."

Fu Hongxue admitted to it.

He had naturally seen it, and not only once.

Xiao Siwu said, "Right now, I only want to ask you one thing. If you won't tell me, I won't blame you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Ask."

Xiao Siwu said, "Why, exactly, is my flying dagger inferior to Ye Kai's?"

Fu Hongxue was silent. Only after a long time did he speak. "You ambushed me twice with your dagger. The first time, you used all your strength, but before you struck, you gave me a warning. The second time, although there was no warning, you held back twenty percent of your strength."

Xiao Siwu did not deny it.

Fu Hongxue said, "This is because in your heart, you know that you shouldn't kill me. You simply do not have a reason which makes it absolutely necessary for you to kill me, and so when you strike, you lack a righteous, all-conquering air."

He slowly continued, "But the people whom Ye Kai killed, were all people who absolutely had to be killed. Therefore, he is superior to you!"

Xiao Siwu said, "Is it this alone?"

Fu Hongxue said, "This is enough. You will never be able to surpass him!"

Xiao Siwu was silent for a long time as well. Suddenly, he turned around. Without even looking back, he departed.

Fu Hongxue didn't turn around.

After walking for some time, Xiao Siwu suddenly turned around again. He loudly said, "Just wait. There will be a day when I am stronger than him. When that day comes, I will kill you."

Fu Hongxue lightly said, "I will definitely wait for you."

If you intend to kill someone, abstain from nothing at all.

This time, should Fu Hongxue have killed Xiao Siwu?

“This time, you did not kill him. I fear that next time, you will die to him.”

This time, Fu Hongxue once again did not strike. But he didn’t regret it, because he had already laid down a seed within Xiao Siwu’s heart.

The seed of righteousness.

He knew that this type of seed would flower and bear fruit one day.

He walked out of the alleyway. That seventeen year old girl had once more placed that strand of jasmine flowers in her hair. She stood at the door to her home, secretly looking at Fu Hongxue. She appeared both fearful and curious.

No one had ever given her a few dozen taels of silver for no reason at all. This pale-faced cripple must be a true eccentric.

Although Fu Hongxue didn’t want to see her again, it was difficult for him to not even spare her a glance.

Just as he reached the exit, she suddenly said in a loud voice, “You hit me. That’s an indication that you like me. I know that you will definitely come back to find me.”

Her voice became even louder. “I will definitely wait for you.”

The Ancient Monastery of the Heavenly Dragon was actually the Great Heavenly Dragon Monastery. It was originally a place of great splendor and burning incense. No one knew why it suddenly became cold and desolate. But there were many legends and myths as to why that was now the case.

The most widespread legend said this: “This ancient temple which looked solemn and majestic on the outside, was actually a den of sin. The beautiful woman who came to this monastery to pray before the Buddha would often be kidnapped and taken to hidden rooms deep within the monastery. Those who resisted would be beaten to death.”

Thus, whenever there was no moon or stars in the sky, their lonely, wronged spirits would appear.

With regards to whether or not this temple actually had secret rooms, and exactly how many women from good families were raped and defiled, no one was sure, because no one had personally seen any of this!

But ever since this story became widespread, the people who came to this temple to pay their respects slowly became fewer in number.

The type of person who would actually believe that spending a little money on sesame oil would buy them four seasons worth of peace and prosperity naturally wouldn't carefully consider the truth or falsehoods inherent in rumors.

There was a dense forest outside of the ancient monastery. Although it was spring, the fallen leaves were very plentiful.

The road which led to the monastery had long since been covered by fallen leaves. Even people who often came here might not be able to recognize the road from within the dark forest.

Fu Hongxue hadn't come here even once!

From his current viewpoint, there were large trees all around which looked absolutely identical.

He couldn't tell which direction was the right one.

Just as he was hesitating, the sound of footsteps could be heard on the fallen leaves. A monk with features as delicate and refined as a crane's walked by on the leaves. There wasn't a single speck of dust on his fluttering, moon-white robes.

Although he wasn't very old, he appeared to definitely be a monk of very high learning.

Although Fu Hongxue wasn't a pious follower of Buddhism, he still respected eminent monks and men of learning.

"Master, where are you headed?"

“I come from where I came from. Naturally, I am headed to the place I am going.”

The monk's features were very heavy, and his hands were clasped together. He didn't even look at Fu Hongxue.

But Fu Hongxue wasn't willing to give up the chance of asking for directions. He didn't have the time to go on a wrong road.

“Master, do you know by which road one should travel to the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon?”

“Come with me.”

The monk's footsteps were slow and peaceful. It seemed as though even if this road were headed to the Western Paradise, he wouldn't hurry up even slightly.

Fu Hongxue could only slowly follow him from behind!

The night became even gloomier. They finally arrived before a six-pillared pavilion. The red paint on the banisters of the pavilion had already peeled off. Within the pavilion, there was a zither, a chessboard, a kettle of wine, and a set of ink and a quill. There was also a little stove made from red mud.

To be stroking the zither and playing chess, chanting poems and boiling wine within such a secluded grove, this eminent monk was just like a scholar. Both were very aesthetic.

Although Fu Hongxue had never experienced this sort of relaxed luxury, he still respected others enjoy this sort of refined pleasure.

The eminent monk, as refined and elegant as a crane, had already entered the pavilion. He picked up a chess piece and stared at it. There was a look of great pondering in his eyes, as though he was considering how, exactly, he should make his next move.

Afterwards, he slowly put the chess piece in his mouth. With a gurgle, he swallowed it.

Next, he broke the zither apart and put the wooden pieces into the oven, and lit a fire. He poured the alcohol in the pot out and washed his feet with it, then poured the ink in the inkstone into wine kettle and boiled it on top of the fire. Then he lifted up the chessboard and rapped on it non-stop, revealing a satisfied smile on his face, as though this sound was much more beautiful than the sounds of zither playing.

Fu Hongxue, watching, was stunned.

This seemingly advanced, erudite monk was actually a crazy monk?

Fu Hongxue was stunned yet again.

That monk is not only crazy, he also likes to eat flesh. Human flesh.

That monk was looking at him up and down, as though appraising how much flesh there was on his bones.

But Fu Hongxue still couldn't believe it.

"You really are a crazy monk?"

"Crazy is sane. Sane is crazy." The monk giggled. "Perhaps the truly crazy one isn't me, but you."

"Me?"

"If you weren't crazy, why would you court death?"

Fu Hongxue tightened his hands. "You know who I am? Know where I am going?"

The monk nodded, then shook his head. He suddenly raised his head to the sky, then mumbled, "It's over, all over. A thousand-year old ancient monastery is about to collapse. A sea of people will become drenched with blood. Where do you want this monk to go?"

He suddenly picked up the wine kettle on the fire, then poured its contents into his mouth. The ink overflowed, pouring out of the corners of his lips, dripping down and staining his moon-white robes.



He suddenly fell to his knees and began to loudly weep. Pointing to the west, he loudly shouted, "If you want to die, hurry up and go die! Sometimes, living is a fate worse than death."

Just at this moment, the sound of a bell being struck suddenly came from the west.

This was the thousand-year old copper bell of the ancient monastery. Only it could produce such a clear, loud, and melodious sound.

If there was only a mad monk in this ancient monastery, who was ringing the bell?

The bitterly crying monk suddenly jumped up. His eyes were suddenly filled with shock and terror.

"This is a funeral bell." He loudly cried out, "When a funeral bell sounds, then someone is surely about to die!"

Rising to his feet, he threw the wine kettle at Fu Hongxue, then continued, "If you don't die, others will die. Why don't you hurry up and go die?"

Fu Honxue looked at him. He dully said, "I go."

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## Chapter 16 – Funeral Bell

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The bell had stopped ringing, but the echoes remained. Fu Hongxue had already arrived at the main gate of the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon.

Although the dark grey monastery was constructed long ago, it still retained vestiges of its former glory and prestige. In the courtyard, there was an enormous thousand-jin copper cooking vessel, stained with rust. The stone steps were covered with moss as well. Although it did appear a bit gloomy and unfrequented, the grand, majestic main hall still towered like a mountain over the surroundings, and the pillars in the courtyard remained as strong and erect as a tiger's spine.

How could such a strong, vigorous monastery suddenly collapse?

“The words of a crazy monk are naturally crazy words.”

It had been a long time since the sacrificial altar in the main hall had enjoyed the scent of meat or burning joss sticks. But it was still lofty and high above, staring down at the ignorance and suffering of men. The corners of the hall were filled with cobwebs, and the old, shabby curtains fluttered hither and fro in the wind. There was neither sight nor sound of human being here.

Where was the one who rang the funeral bell?

Fu Hongxue silently stood in front of the statue of Buddha. In his heart, he suddenly felt an extremely strange feeling. He suddenly wanted to kneel down, kneel down before this Buddha, whose gilt skin had already begun to peel off. To beg for peace, peace for Zhuo Yuzhen and her children.

This was the first time in his life he felt so pious. But he did not kneel down, because just at this time, a swishing sound came from outside of the main hall.

When he turned his head, he saw a rainbow-colored, lightning-like flash of sabre light flickering outside. Where the sabre light flashed, those pillars in the courtyard, as strong and erect as a tiger's spine, were severed. Swishing sounds continually entered the ear, and the mountain-like main hall began to tremble and sway.

He inclined his head upwards, and immediately saw that the pillars and beams supporting the ceiling were beginning to slide down.

The words of that crazy monk weren't just crazy words. After the dancing sabre light flashed across the main hall, this towering, millennia-old monastery truly did collapse!

What type of sabre was that? How could it have such fearsome strength?

Fu Hongxue tightly gripped his sabre!

This sabre was a weapon beyond compare, but this sabre definitely didn't have such a fearsome strength!

With a thundering sound, one corner of the main hall collapsed.

But Fu Hongxue did not collapse. The mountains might burst and the earth might split, but some people will never collapse.

Another corner of the main hall collapsed. Rubble and debris flew about as though propelled by wind. The swallows on the roof beams had long since flown away.

But Fu Hongxue continued to stand there without moving!

Outside, not only was the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch, that weapon which could anger gods and aggrieve demons, waiting for him, but also innumerable murderous plots and tricks!

He suddenly sneered.

"Demon Decapitator Miao, you have a very fine sabre, but you yourself are a base creature. Why don't you dare to stand face to face with me and fight to the death, and instead run around playing tricks?"

The sabre light disappeared. Someone sneered from outside the main hall as well. "As long as you aren't dead, come to the inner courtyard to meet me."

The laughter of the Heaven's Monarch, the Demon Decapitator, sounded like the crying of ghosts. One word at a time, he continued, "I will definitely wait for you!"

"I will definitely wait for you."

The exact phrase, the exact six words. But coming from two different mouths, they had two totally different meanings!

At this moment in time, Fu Hongxue suddenly thought of that girl who wore the jasmine flowers. He thought of how she fell to the ground, and of her eyes, filled with pain, sorrow, and despair.

She was also a person. No matter what type of person one was, they wouldn't be willing to accept that sort of humiliation.

Could it be that all her life, she was destined to live in that crumbling, swaying room, without any road to take, and no path of escape, until debris and dirt covered her body?

Fu Hongxue's hands tightened. He suddenly started walking out. He walked very slowly, and his gait still appeared painful and ugly. But since he began to walk, he definitely would not stop.

The doorway had collapsed. The flying dust covered his eyes, as he slowly walked past the broken pieces of wood.

Another sound, akin to giant earthquakes and massive landslides. The center of the main hall had collapsed as well.

Debris and shattered pieces of wood collided into his back.

He did not look back. He didn't even blink. This required not only an astonishing degree of composure, it also required an unshakable, fearless degree of courage! Precisely because he was composed, precisely because he had courage, he avoided the first trap.

Just as he stepped foot over the main hall's doorway, at least fifty or so hidden projectiles shot out at him from outside.

If he had looked back in surprise, if he had lost his composure, he would have collapsed.

Collapsed, just like this majestic monastery.

Courage and self-confidence are the pillars of a man, helping preserve humanity's existence.

So long as these two pillars do not fall, mankind shall never be extinguished!

Just as these hidden projectiles were shot out, two rays of cold light shot out as well, intersecting. It was a sword and a hook!

Fu Hongxue's sabre had already left its sheath. With a slanted flash of sabre light, he scurried out.

He didn't dare to stop and look back. He didn't know how many other deadly ambushes were there.

The copper vessel in the courtyard was still there. His slender body shot out like a javelin, coming down just behind the copper vessel.

A gust of wind blew towards him. He felt it was as cold as a sabre's chop on his shoulders. After looking down, he realized that a four-inch long wound had been left on his shoulder. The sword and the hook had launched an extremely swift and deadly assault. If someone hadn't personally experienced the attack, they wouldn't be able to imagine it.

Blood flowed from his shoulder. Blood flowed from his sabre as well. Whose blood was dripping from his sabre?

That hook was naturally Gongsun Tu's eagle-beak. But the sword was definitely not Yang Wuji's ancient sword of Damascus steel.

This sword was far faster, far more accurate, and far more fearful than Yang Wuji's sword. In addition, Yang Wuji's sword-arm had been cut off.

The wound on Fu Hongxue's shoulder was a sword wound. Who had his sabre harmed?

The main hall seemed to have totally collapsed by now. Turning around, he didn't see anybody at all.

If the first strike does not land true, fully withdraw! This wasn't just the rule of the Xingxiuhai sect. It was also the principle by which old veterans of the martial world followed without fail!

But why didn't that Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch appear again? With the first attack, he chopped the horse in half. With his second, he destroyed the great hall. Why didn't he strike at Fu Hongxue? Was he really waiting for Fu Hongxue at the inner courtyard?

The inner courtyard was peaceful and secluded. But there wasn't even a shadow here either. Within the verdant mulberry grove, there was someone singing light songs. The songs were soft and haunting, causing gloom and capable of extinguishing one's soul.

There were three lit verandas in the grove. The doors and the windows were all open.

As soon as one entered the grove, one could see a giant who looked like a deity from heaven. He was squatting in front of a barbarian bed, his hair all tousled, tied together with a golden ribbon. On his body, he wore a golden embroidered robe. But beneath his waist, he wore a battle-kilt made from a tiger's pelt. Light shone out of his panther-like eyes, and his bronze skin sparkled. He looked just like one of the titans, who existed when the heavens and the earth were first separated, or like an undefeatable god of war from the myths.

Four women with coifed hair and light garments were wrapped around his body. One was holding a golden cup and sitting on his knee. Another was combing his hair. A third was taking off his boots. The other was sitting far away beneath the window, and singing in a low voice. They came from the cart on which the Ghostly Granny had arrived in. Although they were no longer young, they had their own mature, graceful, womanly elegance.

If they weren't mature women, how could they endure such a virile, healthy titan?

A stove burned in one corner of the room. A sabre was placed on the table. The handle of the sabre was one foot, three inches long. The blade was seven feet, nine inches long. There were many dazzling pearls sewn onto the beautiful shark-skin sheath.

This sabre was the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch? This man was Miao Tianwang, Heaven's Monarch Miao?

Fu Hongxue stepped onto the leaves. He slowly made his way over.

He already saw this person. Although his features were still totally expressionless, every single nerve in his body had become taut.

Strength great enough to destroy a hall, and to cut a galloping horse in half, originally could only be found in fairytales. But now, it just so happened to appear right in front of his eyes.

The woman singing a song beneath the window only turned to glance at him. Her song did not change, but it sounded even more dreary now.

The woman holding the golden cup suddenly let out a sigh. "Why would a perfect good person, insist on coming here to die?"

The woman combing his hair coldly said, "Because even if he was alive, he wouldn't be happy."

But the woman taking off his boots began to laugh. "I like to see people being killed."

The woman combing his hair said, "But it might not be good to see this person be killed."

The woman taking off his boots said, "Why?"

The woman combing his hair said, "Judging from his face, this person probably doesn't have a drop of blood in his veins."

The woman holding the golden cup said, "Even if he does, it's probably cold."

The woman taking off his boots was still laughing. "Cold blood is better than no blood. I just want to see a little bit of blood. I've always been a very easily satisfied woman."

Fu Hongxue had already walked to the window. He stopped. It seemed as though he hadn't heard a single word which they had said.

He really hadn't heard a single word.

Because he had already poured all of his attention and focus into this godlike titan.

He suddenly asked, "Miao Tianwang?"

Miao Tianwang had already stretched out his massive hand, gripping the sabre on the table.

Fu Hongxue said, "This is the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch?"

Miao Tianwang coldly said, "Sometimes, it decapitates demons. Sometimes, it kills men. So long as the sabre leaves the sheath, no matter who the target is, he will die beneath its blade."

Fu Hongxue said, "Very good."

Miao Tianwang's panther-like eyes revealed a trace of surprise. "Very good?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Your sabre is already in your hand. My body is already beneath your sabre. Isn't that very good?"

Miao Tianwang laughed. "Very good. It truly is very good."

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, I haven't died yet."

Miao Tianwang said, "Life and death have always been things which pass in the twinkling of an eye. I'm not in a rush. Why are you in a hurry?"

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.



The hilt of the sabre was wreathed in purple silk. It was the color of congealed blood.

Miao Tianwang's hand gently stroked the hilt of the sabre. He suddenly said, "Are you waiting for me to draw my sabre?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Miao Tianwang said, "The rumors of the martial world say that your sabre is a weapon which is fast beyond compare!"

Fu Hongxue didn't deny it.

Miao Tianwang said, "Why don't you draw first?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I want to see your sabre."

If I pull out my sabre, I'm afraid that your sabre will never have a chance to leave the sheath again!

Although he didn't say those words, his meaning was very obvious.

Miao Tianwang suddenly laughed loudly. He suddenly stood up, and the woman sitting on his knee immediately rolled off the bed.

Standing, he towered at least nine feet high. His waist was so thick, it couldn't be embraced. He looked all the more majestic and awe-inspiring.

Only a person such as him was worthy of using a sabre such as this.

Fu Hongxue stood in front of him, appearing like a black panther standing in front of a majestic lion.

Although the majestic lion was awe-inspiring and terrifying, the panther would definitely not cower from it.

Miao Tianwang's laughter didn't stop. "Do you insist on me drawing first?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Miao Tianwang said, "You won't regret it?"

Fu Hongxue smirked.

Just at this moment, a thunderbolt-like flash was charging downwards at him!

Miao Tianwang's hand was still gripping the hilt of the sabre. The blade was still hidden within the pearl-encrusted sheath. He hadn't drawn his sabre! The sabre light flew out from behind Fu Hongxue, as though lightning had suddenly struck out from clear skies.

Fu Hongxue had already focused all of his attention on the titan in front of him. How could he imagine that the sabre light would come from behind him? Although the woman outside had not ceased her song, she had secretly closed her eyes.

She had already seen this thunderbolt-like sabre flash's power. Where the sabre appeared, flesh and blood would fly.

She had seen it too many times. She couldn't bear to watch! She clearly didn't really like to watch people being killed.

But this time, after the sabre flash chopped down, flesh and blood didn't fly about.

Fu Hongxue's body suddenly shot out at an incline, just perfectly managing to flit by the sabre flash. His sabre had already left the sheath as well, and with a backwards chop, he counter-attacked to the rear.

He had already calculated the position. This sabre attack of his should've landed right above the knees of the sabre-wielding man behind him. He never miscalculated. And his sabre had never missed its mark!

But after his sabre shot out, he didn't see blood. He only heard a swishing sound. It wasn't the sound of bones being snapped. It was the sound of bamboo being chopped.

The nine-foot long Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch flew out into the air. The tip of the sabre sliced into the ground, emanating a startling rainbow sabre light. From within the startling rainbow sabre light, it seemed as though there was a very small human shadow. With a sad and shrill laugh, it flew into the mulberry grove!

The laughter disappeared with the shadow. But two shattered wooden sticks had suddenly appeared on the ground.

Could it be that these were the two legs of that person?

Can it be that he came while walking on stilts?

Fu Hongxue turned around. His sabre was already sheathed.

The godlike deity had already fallen down on top of the barbarian bed. All of his earlier majesty and aura had totally disappeared. Could it be that the undefeatable god of war was nothing more than a paper puppet?

Staring at him, Fu Hongxue said, "Who was that person?"

The titan said, "Miao Tianwang. He is the real Miao Tianwang."

Fu Hongxue said, "And you?"

The titan said, "I am only his puppet, a puppet for the attention of others to be drawn to. Just like this sabre."

He drew the sabre.

From within the magnificent, pearl-embroidered sheath, he drew out a wooden sabre with a layer of silver paint on top of it. This really was totally preposterous. Only a madman would do something like this.

Fu Hongxue couldn't help but ask, "What type of person is he, exactly? Why did he do something like this?"

The giant bowed his head.

The woman holding the golden cup was pouring alcohol into it nonstop. She poured for herself and drank it herself.

The song of the woman underneath the window suddenly stopped. In a loud voice, she said, "They don't dare tell you. I'll tell you."

Her song was gentle and beautiful. However, her voice was now grief and hoarse with pain. "He isn't a man at all, but he is desperate to believe in the

illusion that he is a husband who can satisfy four women at once. He is only three feet, eight inches tall, but is desperate to believe in the illusion that he is a godlike giant. He does all of these things, simply because he is a madman.”

The woman holding the golden cup suddenly clapped her hands and laughed loudly. “Great! Great cursing! Such wonderful cursing!”

She was laughing, but her face had already become contorted with pain. “Why don’t you straight-forwardly show this man surnamed Fu, how our mighty husband ‘satisfies’ us?”

The woman who was taking off his shoes suddenly tore her clothes apart. Her snow-white chest was filled with traces of lash marks.

“This is how he ‘satisfies’ us!” Her laughter was even more miserable than sobs. “I’ve always been an easily satisfied woman. I am simply so satisfied that I could die.”

Fu Hongxue silently turned around. He silently walked away. He couldn’t bear to look, and couldn’t bear to listen.

He suddenly thought of that girl who wore the jasmine flowers once more. They were all the same. They had been wreaked, had been devastated.

In the eyes of men, they were all women without face.

Were they shameless because they were enduring the depredations of men?

No matter how frenzied the depredations, they couldn’t help but endure it. Because they simply couldn’t resist, and had no place to run to. Is this what being ‘without face’ really meant? Is this ‘shamelessness’?

The women were shouting, “Why don’t you rescue us? Why won’t you take us away?”

Fu Hongxue didn’t look back.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to rescue them. But he didn’t have the ability to whatsoever. There simply was nobody who could solve their problem.

So long as men who 'really wanted face' existed in the world, there would definitely be 'shameless' women such as them in the world.

This is the real problem. This problem could never, ever be solved.

Fu Hongxue didn't look back, because he almost wasn't able to resist from vomiting. He knew that the only way he could save them, wasn't by taking them away. Only by killing Miao Tianwang could he truly free them.

Freshly broken twigs were on the ground. They had been shattered by a sabre. It was the sabre of the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch.

He chased down the path of these tracks.

Perhaps Miao Tianwang had long since fled far away. He wasn't really chasing Miao Tianwang, but an objective. He knew that so long as breath remained in his body, he would never give up this objective!

By now he realized why Yan Nanfei absolutely had to kill Gongzi Yu.

What they were killing wasn't actually the person, but the evil and tyranny which that person represented. He passed by the mulberry forest and entered the inner courtyard. A person was standing in the middle of the rubble of the courtyard, laughing stupidly at him.

"Even a millennia-old monastery has collapsed. Why haven't you died? What are you waiting for?"

On his moon-white monastic robes, ink dribbled here and there. But in his hands, he held a freshly blooming flower.

A fresh, new, pure flower.

A tiny yellow flower.

At the foot of a mountain, there was a cabin which not only had bamboo growing outside of it, but also a few yellow flowers.

It was planted by a young girl. A girl with big eyes and long hair.

Fu Hongxue's heart sunk. His pupils suddenly contracted, and the hand with which he gripped the sabre clenched even tighter.

"Where did this flower come from?"

"People come from their origins. Flowers naturally come from their origins as well!"

The crazy monk was still laughing stupidly. He suddenly tossed the flower in his hand to Fu Hongxue.

"First look and see what type of flower this is."

"I cannot tell."

"This is a flower of grief and farewell."

"There's no such flower in the world." Fu Hongxue's flower-holding hand was ice cold.

"There is. Since there is grief in the world and farewells in the world, why wouldn't there be a flower of grief and farewell?"

The crazy monk was no longer laughing. In his eyes, there was a look of indescribable pain. "Since there is such a thing as a flower of grief and farewell, the person who picked it would naturally be grieved and about to bid farewell."

Fu Hongxue held the flower with his two hands. His hands did not move, and there was no wind here.

But the petals of the flower suddenly began to fall, and the stem of the flower began to wither.

These two hands were originally used to draw his sabre. The force in these two hands was more than enough to destroy all life.

The crazy monk's sadness became even greater. "The flower came from its origins, and has gone to its departure point. What about the person? Why hasn't the person gone back yet?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Go back where?"

The crazy monk said, "From whence one came, is where one should return. If you go back now, perhaps you'll make it in time."

Fu Hongxue said, "In time to do what?"

The crazy monk said, "How should I know what you are going to do?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Who, exactly, are you?"

The crazy monk said, "I am only a crazy monk. I only happened to pick up a little flower, is all!"

He suddenly waved his hands and shouted loudly, "Go, hurry up and leave and do what you need to do! Don't come here and bother this monk! Monks want tranquility!"

The monk had already sat down, in the midst of the rubble. In the blink of an eye, he became still.

Although the main hall of the monastery had been wrecked, the main hall in his heart was still perfect and untarnished. That was like the shell of a snail. When the wind and the rain arrived, he could immediately hide inside it.

Was he able to tell that the wind and the rain had arrived now?

The setting sun shone across the sky. There was no rain or wind. Wind and rain are in the hearts of man. In the heart of Fu Hongxue.

Did this flower come from near the bamboo patch? Why was it called the flower of grief and farewell?

Who was grieved? Who was departing?

Fu Hongxue didn't ask. He didn't dare ask. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't get it out.

If he wanted to know the answer, he had only one method.

He used all of his energy to rush back.

If you go back now, perhaps you'll make it in time.

But by the time he got back, it was already too late.

The yellow flowers beneath the bamboo patch had totally disappeared. Not a single petal remained. The people had disappeared as well.

On the table, there was still three vegetable dishes, a pot of porridge, and two sets of chopsticks. The porridge was still warm!

The children's urine on the bed hadn't dried yet either.

Where were they?

"Zhuo Yuzhen! Du Shiqi!"

Fu Hongxue howled loudly, but there was no reply.

Did Zhuo Yuzhen desert him? Or did Du Shiqi betray them?

Fu Hongxue raised his head to the heavens. He asked the sky, but the sky did not respond. He asked the stars, but they were silent. He asked the bright moon, but the bright moon had long since sunk down. Where would he have to go in order to find them? Where could he go, to hide from this wind and rain?

The night was gloomy and dark. From within the darkness, there were suddenly three popping sounds, and then a lightning bolt appeared!

It wasn't a lightning bolt. It was sabre light. From within the sabre light, the shadow of a person taller than a tree could be seen.

The shadow flew out at the same time as the sabre light. It was a deformed dwarf. He walked on a three foot long bamboo pole, and in his hands, he wielded a nine foot long sabre.

The Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch.

A flash of sabre light. It chopped apart the bamboo patch, then rushed towards Fu Hongxue.



Fu Hongxue retreated eight feet.

The sabre light chopped again. The eaves of the house split apart. The power of the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch was like that of a thunderbolt or a thunderclap. The vertical sabre once more chopped at Fu Hongxue. In the blink of an eye, over seven chops had been launched.

Fu Hongxue continued to retreat. He could only retreat, because he could neither block nor counterattack. He had to leap three feet into the air before his sabre could hit Miao Tianwang, who was standing on those bamboo poles. But his entire body had been surrounded by the power of the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch.

Miao Tianwang was gripping the sabre with both hands. One chop followed after another, not even giving him the chance to pant!

But even true thunderbolts and thunderclaps had an interval time. Even a real god of war would eventually exhaust his strength.

Fu Hongxue dodged over forty nine sabre chops in a row. His body suddenly shot out from within the sabre light.

His sabre had shot out as well.

The Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch was too long. A foot longer, a foot stronger, as the saying goes...but the blade could only strike from afar. When the enemy rushed into close combat, there was no one way to save oneself.

He saw this fatal flaw of Miao Tianwang's. His sabre had already pierced towards Miao Tianwang's heart.

Who would have imagined that just at this moment, Miao Tianwang's stilts suddenly shattered into many pieces!

He suddenly fell down from the sky, and released the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch as well. With a backhand, he drew out a different sabre.

A short sabre, radiating cold light in all directions. Carrying his body's downward force, it pierced towards Fu Hongxue's chest.

Fu Hongxue's sure-fire attack had instead become his own fatal weakness.

When a brave panther charged towards a person, an experienced hunter would often dodge from beneath them and use a knife to split them open.

Right now, Fu Hongxue's mid-air body was like that of a leaping panther. The hunter's knife had already reached his chest.

He could even sense that the ice-cold sabre had split apart his clothes.

Miao Tianwang had already calculated that he definitely could not dodge this slash. This wasn't the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch, but it was still a sabre for killing people.

He had already concentrated all of his strength into that sabre, but his strength suddenly disappeared. All strength suddenly disappeared. It was as though all of the air in a balloon had suddenly escaped through a hole. His sabre clearly could have pierced Fu Hongxue's chest, but he had no power left to stab with.

What had happened? He didn't understand. Even in death, he didn't understand!

He saw blood, but it wasn't Fu Hongxue's blood. Where did the blood come from? He didn't understand this either!

Only now did he suddenly feel an indescribably cold feeling in his throat, as though it had already been cut open.

But he couldn't believe it.

He definitely could not believe that when the sabre light had flashed earlier, it had already cut open his throat. Even in death, he wouldn't believe that there could be such a fast sabre in the world.

He didn't even see that sabre.

Fu Hongxue fell down as well. He fell into the middle of the bamboo patch. Heaven and earth reverted to its earlier peacefulness and silence.

He suddenly felt very tired. Although the earlier events had passed in the blink of an eye, in that blink of an eye, he had exhausted all of his strength.

The distance between life and death is such a very fine line.

Only now did he truly understand the meaning of this phrase. Just then, he really was too close to dying. This battle really was a vicious battle the likes of which he had never fought before.

Stars filled the sky. The blood had already dried. Miao Tianwang's blood. Not his!

But he too had a type of feeling, as though all of his blood had dried up as well. Right now, if Miao Tianwang could brandish his sabre, he definitely would not be able to resist.

He even felt as though if a child with a rusty knife came here, he would still die.

Fortunately, dead men couldn't wield sabres. And so late at night, nobody would come to this mountain village.

He closed his eyes, hoping to be able to take a nap. Only with a clear mind could one think about moving.

Who would have imagined that somebody would come, right at this moment.

Suddenly, a patter of footsteps could suddenly be heard in the darkness. Within the slow, unhurried footsteps, there seemed to be a strange rhythm.

Only a person who was totally confident in what he was doing had such a rhythm while walking.

Who was this person? Why did he come here? What did he come here for?

Fu Hongxue listened silently. In his heart, he suddenly felt a strange feeling as well.

The rhythm of these footsteps seemed to be exactly the same as the rhythm of that bell within the ancient monastery.

That was a funeral bell.

The rhythm of these footsteps seemed to be filled with a murderous air as well.



## Chapter 17 – Despair

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The sound of the footsteps slowly drew near. From within the darkness, a man finally appeared. In his hands, he held a flower.

A tiny yellow flower.

The one who came was the crazy monk.

He was still wearing that ink-splattered robe. He slowly walked over, placing the yellow flower within the midst of the bamboo patch.

“People return to their origins. Flowers return to their origins as well.”

That dense sadness remained in his eyes. “But although the yellow flower is the same as it ever was, the features of this place have totally changed.”

Fu Hongxue was also stupidly staring at the yellow flower beneath the bamboo patch. “You know where I came from. You also knew where the flower came from. Thus, you came.”

The crazy monk said, “What do you know?”

Fu Hongxue said, “I know nothing.”

The crazy monk said, “You don’t know who plucked the flower. Do you also not know who I am?”

Fu Hongxue said, “Who are you?”

The crazy monk suddenly pointed at the ink splatters on his robes. “Can you tell what this is?”

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

The crazy monk let out a sigh. He suddenly sat down in front of Fu Hongxue. "Take another look. You must look at it whole heartedly."

Fu Hongxue hesitated, but finally sat as well.

The faint starlight gleamed down upon this originally-spotless white monk's robe, upon the messy ink.

He quietly looked, as though he were staring at tiny bit of light from a burning joss stick in that hidden room.

If you felt as though this joss stick was no longer flickering, and was in fact as bright as a torch, then you had succeeded halfway.

And then, you would even able to see the smoke rising above the joss very clearly, as clear as the white clouds above a high mountain.

He wholeheartedly stared. He suddenly felt as though the messy ink splatters were no longer messy, as though there was a strange rhythm to them.

And then, he realized these messy ink splatters formed a painting. Within it, it seemed as though there were high mountains, flowing rivers, and sabre light which danced without ceasing, as well as tears on the face of children.

"What, exactly, did you paint?"

"That which is in your heart, is what I have painted."

Paintings were always given birth from the heart.

This wasn't merely just any painting. It was a superb masterpiece of art.

Light shone out of Fu Hongxue's eyes. "I know who you are now. You must be Gongzi Yu's subordinate, Wu Hua."

The crazy monk laughed loudly. "There clearly is a painting. Why must you say that there is no painting? If there was no painting, how could there be a person?" [The pronunciation of the name 'Wu Hua' sounds exactly like the words for 'no painting'.]

“What person?”

“Naturally, the person in the painting.”

Within the picture, there were tears on the face of children. Naturally, they were the people he was thinking of. “Where did they go?”

The crazy monk said, “There clearly is a person, but you still insist on asking. It seems the crazy one isn’t the monk, but you.”

Laughing loudly, he pointed with a finger. “Take another look. Aren’t the people right there?”

He was pointing at that small room.

The doors and the windows of the small house were always open. But at some point in time, lights were lit as well.

Fu Hongxue stared along his pointing finger. He was instantly stunned.

The room really did have two people. Du Shiqi and Zhuo Yuzhen were there, eating gruel.

The bowl of gruel which had turned cold, suddenly was steaming warm again.

Fu Hongxue’s entire body had become ice cold.

Could it be that they were the same as the ink painting on the monk’s clothes; that they were totally imaginary?

They were not!

There really were two living people in the room. They really were Du Shiqi and Zhuo Yuzhen.

After seeing the ink on the monk’s clothes, it seemed as though he could clearly see every single wrinkle on their faces, as though he could even see the pores on their faces open and close, their muscles jumping about.

But they didn’t pay him any attention at all.

Most people, in a situation like this, would jump up, rush over, or shout loudly.

Fu Hongxue wasn't most people.

Although he had already stood up, he only quietly stood there, not even moving.

Because he not only saw them, he saw even more deeply, saw even further. In the blink of an eye, he saw the entire truth to the whole affair.

The crazy monk said, "Are the people you are looking for here?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

The crazy monk said, "Why don't you go over there?"

Fu Hongxue slowly turned his head. He fixed him with his gaze. His eyes, which had turned red with sorrow and exhaustion earlier, suddenly became clear and grim. He gazed at him with dagger-sharp eyes for a long time, before slowly saying, "I only hope you understand one thing."

The crazy monk said, "Speak."

Fu Hongxue said, "If I were to pull out my sabre right now, you will certainly die. In heaven or on earth, there is definitely no one who can save you."

The crazy monk laughed again, but his laughter seemed a bit forced. "I've already let you see the people you are looking for, but you want me to die!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Looking at them isn't enough."

The crazy monk said, "What else do you want?"

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "I want you to quietly sit here. I want you to tell the people who are hiding behind the door and in the corners of the room to come out. If they so much as harm a hair on Zhuo Yuzhen or Du Shiqi's head, I will immediately cut your throat."

The crazy monk no longer laughed. His eyes, which always happily stared at others with a stupid expression, suddenly became clear and ruthless. After



a long period of time, he slowly said, "You didn't see wrongly. There truly are people hiding behind the door and in the corners of the room. But they definitely won't come out."

Fu Hongxue said, "You don't believe that I will kill you?"

The crazy monk said, "I do believe."

Fu Hongxue said, "You don't care?"

The crazy monk said, "I care very much. Unfortunately, they don't care. Killing and bleeding have long ago become common sights to them. Even if you chop me into ground meat, I guarantee that they won't even frown."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.

He knew that these words were true words, because he already saw a face appear in the window. He already saw the sabre scars and hideous grin.

The person hiding in the corner of the room was Gongsun Tu.

The crazy monk dully said, "You should understand this person very well. Even if you chopped his own son into ground meat, I'm afraid he still wouldn't even frown."

Fu Hongxue couldn't deny it.

The crazy monk said, "Right now, I only want to understand one thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "Speak."

The crazy monk said, "If they chopped Zhuo Yuzhen and Du Shiqi into ground meat, would you care?"

Fu Hongxue's hands tightened, but his heart sunk.

Gongsun Tu suddenly laughed loudly. "Great! Great question! I can also guarantee that if Fu Hongxue so much as harms a hair on your head, I will immediately cut their throats."

Fu Hongxue's pale face had already been twisted with rage and pain.

The crazy monk said, "Do you believe the words he said?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I believe. And I care very much. I want them to keep on living, but I don't know what you want?"

The crazy monk said, "Will you give us whatever we want?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "So long as they live. So long as I have it."

The crazy monk laughed again. "I just want you to take off your clothes. Take everything off."

Fu Hongxue's pallid face suddenly turned red. Every single vein on his body had suddenly bulged out. He would rather die than accept this sort of humiliation. However, right now he simply could not resist.

The crazy monk said, "I want you to strip right now. Strip everything off."

Fu Hongxue lifted his hand up.

But he didn't pull his clothes off. He drew out his sabre!

Sabre light flashed like lightning.

His body seemed even quicker than the sabre light.

During that flash of light, his body had already entered the wooden room, and his sabre had pierced into the wooden door.

A miserable wail within the room. Someone inside fell down. It was 'If he intends to kill somebody, he abstains from nothing at all', Yang Wuji.

He only had one hand left.

He never would have imagined that a sabre would pierce into his chest from through the door.

Stunned, he looked at Fu Hongxue, as though to say, "So you killed me just like this?"

Fu Hongxue coldly glanced at him, as though he were saying, "If you intend to kill someone, abstain from nothing at all. I learned this from you."

None of these words were said, because before Yang Wuji could say even a single word, he stopped breathing.

Fu Hongxue only glanced at him once. When he glanced at him, his sabre turned towards Gongsun Tu.

Gongsun Tu's somersaulted backwards, jumping out the window.

He actually avoided the chop.

Because this chop was not intended to kill. Fu Hongxue used that chop to protect Zhuo Yuzhen.

With a flash of sabre light, the sabre entered the sheath again.

Gongsun Tu stood within the bamboo patch far away. Cold sweat poured down from his scarred face like rain.

Zhuo Yuzhen put down the gruel. Her tears immediately fell down her face like pearls. Du Shiqi stared at her. There was a strange look in his eyes.

The crazy monk sighed again. "Good. What a very fearsome person. What a quick sabre!"

Although there was no expression on Fu Hongxue's face, his heart was still thumping like mad.

He wasn't totally certain of success in the attack he had just launched. Only, all the trump cards seemed to be held in the enemy's hands, and he had no other choice but to make a risky, last-ditch assault.

Gongsun Tu suddenly laughed coldly. "Although this gamble of yours paid off very well, you still haven't won this game."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Gongsun Tu said, "Because the very last trump card is still in our hands."

What was his last card?

Gongsun Tu said, "Actually, you yourself should be able to think of it. If nobody guided us here, how could we have found this place?"

Fu Hongxue's hand tightened again.

Who, exactly, had sold him out?

He suddenly heard a cry of alarm. Du Shiqi suddenly reached out, seizing Zhuo Yuzhen's arm, grabbing her over and placing her before him.

Fu Hongxue suddenly turned around. "It was you!"

Du Shiqi looked at him. There was still a very strange look in his eyes, as though he wanted to speak, but couldn't bear to.

Fu Hongxue said, "Originally, you were a bold man. How could you do something like this?"

Du Shiqi finally couldn't resist saying, "You..."

He only said that one word, but his eyes suddenly bulged out. Fresh blood suddenly flowed out at the same time from his eyes, his nose, and the corners of his mouth.

Zhuo Yuzhen hit him with her arms, and he fell down. A sharp knife stuck out from between his ribs. A foot-long blade without a handle. His face was skewed with pain, and his lips were spasmodically jerking, as though he were still saying, "I was wrong, wrong..."

It would be difficult for any human being to avoid making a mistake. Nobody was an exception to the rule.

As soon as Zhuo Yuzhen's hands released the knife, she immediately retreated. She suddenly turned around and hugged Fu Hongxue tightly. She cried out, "I killed someone...I killed someone!"

To her, it seemed as though killing someone was worse than being killed.

This clearly was the first time she killed someone.

Fu Hongxue had this sort of experience before. The first time he killed someone, he vomited out all the contents of his stomach.

He understood this feeling.

It was definitely not easy to forget this sort of feeling.

But people continued to kill other people. Only people would kill other people, because some people would force others to kill.

This sort of affair sometimes became like a pestilence. Nobody was able to avoid it, because if you don't kill him, he will kill you.

The one who was killed would have peace. The killer would be embroiled in torment.

Isn't this another satirical tragedy?

TWO

Everything became peaceful again.

Too peaceful.

The blood had already stopped flowing. The foe was far away now. The world was now dark, and no sound at all could be heard.

Even the wailing cries of the children had stopped.

"The children?"

Fu Hongxue's entire body became cold. "Did the children fall into their hands?"

Zhuo Yuzhen suppressed her pain and instead comforted him. "The children will be fine. They don't want the children."

Fu Hongxue immediately asked, "What do they want?"

Zhuo Yuzhen hesitated. "What they want is..."

Fu Hongxue said, "Is it the Peacock Plume?"

Zhuo Yuzhen could only admit it. "They believe that Qiu Shuiqing has already given the Peacock Plume to me. As long as I am willing to give them the Peacock Plume, they will return the children to me."

Her tears began to drip again. "But I do not have the Peacock Plume. I've never even seen that damn thing."

Fu Hongxue's hands were so cold. So cold, it was frightening.

Zhuo Yuzhen clenched his hands. She gloomily said, "I didn't want to tell you this at first. I know that there is no one in the world who can go and get the children back for me."

Fu Hongxue said, "They are my children as well."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "But you don't have the Peacock Plume. Even if you can kill them all, you still won't be able to get my children back."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.

He couldn't deny that he himself couldn't solve this problem. He felt as though there were a dagger slicing his heart.

Zhuo Yuzhen consoled him again, "They won't harm the children for now. But you..."

She gently held Fu Hongxue's pale white face. "You are already too tired, and you are injured as well. You must rest well, and think of a way to temporarily forget about these worries."

Fu Hongxue did not open his mouth, nor did he move.

He was totally numb, because he did not have the Peacock Plume, and he could not rescue his children.

He had personally delivered them into this world, but now he could only watch and do nothing as they suffered. Watch as they die.

Zhuo Yuzhen naturally could see his pain. Crying, she pulled him onto the bed. Pressing his shoulders, she said in a soft voice, "Right now, you must do your best to relax. Don't think about anything. Let me treat your wound."

She gently caressed his face, then forcefully sealed seven of his acupoints.

No one could think of this change. Even if everyone in the world could have thought of this, Fu Hongxue definitely could not have thought of it.

Shocked, he looked at her. But his surprise was far inferior to his pain.

When you truly have treated someone whole heartedly, only to have that person to sell you out...this sort of pain is indescribable.

Zhuo Yuzhen laughed. Her laughter was very soft and gentle, very sweet.

"It seems you are very unhappy. Is it your wound which hurts, or your heart which hurts?"

Her laughter became even more cheerful. "Regardless of which place is hurting, it won't hurt very shortly."

Because dead people can't feel pain.

Smiling, she asked, "Originally, I thought you had the Peacock Plume, but now it seems that I was wrong. So, I will kill you immediately. By then, you won't have any troubles or worries at all."

Fu Hongxue's lips were chapped. He couldn't even say a single word.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I know you must want to ask me why I have treated you like this, but I refuse to tell you."

She looked at his sabre. "You said that nobody is allowed to touch your sabre, but right now, I insist on touching it."

She stretched her hand out and pulled out the sabre. "Not only am I going to touch it, I am going to use this sabre to kill you."

Her hand was only an inch away from the sabre.

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "It's still best if you don't touch it!"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Why?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I still don't want to kill you."

Zhuo Yuzhen laughed loudly. "I insist on touching it, and I want to see what sort of method you will use to kill me."

She finally touched that sabre!

His sabre suddenly flipped up, striking the back of her hand. The pitch-black scabbard felt like a piece of extremely hot metal.

A red mark immediately appeared on her hand. It was so painful, her tears almost immediately came out, but her terror was far greater than her pain.

She clearly remembered forcefully sealing seven of his acupoints, and her movements had always been very accurate.

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, there's something which you never could have imagined."

Zhuo Yuzhen forced herself to ask, "What?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Every single acupoint on my body has already been moved aside by one inch."

Zhuo Yuzhen was stunned.

She hadn't left any room for error in her calculations at all, and her acupoint sealing techniques were correct. The person who was wrong was Fu Hongxue. But even in her dreams, she wouldn't have imagined that his acupoints were in the wrong place as well. This one-inch difference caused her entire plan to fall apart.

She was annoyed and bitterly remorseful, blaming everything and everyone but herself. But she forgot to think about where this one-inch difference came from.



Twenty years of bitter training. An inexhaustible amount of blood and sweat. A steadfast, unsurpassable determination. A teeth-grinding restraint.

This is what he had traded for that one-inch difference. There is no such thing as 'luck' in the world.

She didn't think of any of this. She only thought of one thing. After this defeat, she definitely wouldn't have a second opportunity.

She had totally fallen apart as well.

But Fu Hongxue had already risen to his feet. He coldly stared at her, then suddenly said, "I know you are hurt as well." Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You know?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Your injury is beneath your ribs, between your first and third bones. The wound is four inches long and seven tenths of an inch deep."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "How did you know?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because that was my sabre."

Outside the main hall of the Ancient Monastery of the Heavenly Dragon, blood dripped from the tip of his sabre.

Fu Hongxue said, "The person who ambushed me outside the main hall of the Ancient Monastery of the Heavenly Dragon with Gongsun Tu was you."

Zhuo Yuzhen actually managed to restrain herself. "Right. It was me."

Fu Hongxue said, "Your sword skills are very good."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Not bad."

Fu Hongxue said, "After I went to the monastery, you immediately followed after me."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You didn't move too quickly."

Fu Hongxue said, "The reason why Gongsun Tu and the others were able to find this place, naturally was not because Du Shiqi gave away the secret."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Naturally, it wasn't him. It was me."

Fu Hongxue said, "So you killed him to silence him."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Naturally, I could not let him expose my secret."

Fu Hongxue said, "They were able to find Mingyue Xin. Naturally, this was because of you as well."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "If it wasn't me, how could they have discovered that Mingyue Xin had returned to the secret room within the Peacock Manor?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You admit to all of this?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "Why wouldn't I admit to it?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Why did you do these things?"

Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly removed a pearl flower from her clothes. It was the same pearl flower which he had taken off the body of 'Forefinger' Zhao Ping then given to her in the Peacock Manor.

Looking at this flower, she said, "You certainly must remember where this came from."

Fu Hongxue remembered.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "That day, I didn't want anything. All I wanted was this pearl flower. You must have thought that I was like other women; once I saw pearls, I forgot everything else."

Fu Hongxue said, "You aren't?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "I insisted on taking this pearl flower, because I was afraid that you would see the Peacock Insignia on it."

Fu Hongxue said, "Peacock?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "This pearl flower was a token of love from Qiu Shuiqing to Zhuo Yuzhen. Up to her death, she was still wearing it."

Fu Hongxue said, "Zhuo Yuzhen is already dead?"

Zhuo Yuzhen coldly said, "If she didn't die, how could this pearl flower be on Zhao Ping's body?"

Fu Hongxue suddenly fell silent, because he had to control himself.

After a long time, he lightly let out a sigh. "You really aren't Zhuo Yuzhen. Who are you?"

She laughed again. Her laughter was ruthless and sly. "You ask me who I am? Have you forgotten that I am your wife?"

Fu Hongxue's hand went ice cold.

"I married you. Although it was only because I wanted to give you a burden and hang on to you, to tire you to death, to fight others to the death for me at any place and any time, anybody would have to admit that I still married you."

"....."

"I caused Mingyue Xin's death. I caused Yan Nanfei's death. I killed Du Shiqi. I wanted to kill you. But I am your wife." Her laughter was very brutal. "I just want you to remember this. If you kill me, then go ahead and make your move now!"

Fu Hongxue suddenly charged outside. Without even looking back, he charged into the darkness.

He could no longer look back.

THREE

Darkness. A darkness which caused one to lose all hope and fall into despair.

Fu Hongxue charged like a madman. He couldn't stop, because as soon as he stopped, he would fall down.

He didn't think about anything, because he couldn't think.

The Peacock Manor was destroyed, but Qiu Shuiqing did not complain at all. He only begged one thing of him, only begged him to protect the very last heir to the Qiu family bloodline.

But now, Zhuo Yuzhen was already dead.

'She' knew that the Peacock Insignia was on the pearl flower, and so 'she' was definitely one of the killers.

But he was wholeheartedly taking care of her, protecting her, and had even taken her as his wife.

If it weren't for her, how could Mingyue Xin have died?

If it weren't for him protecting her, how could Yan Nanfei have died?

But he always thought that what he had done was correct. Only now did he know how horrible were the things he had done.

But now, it was too late. Unless a miracle happened, dead people would never come back to life.

He never believed in miracles.

So aside from running about in the darkness like a wild dog, what else could he do right now?

Even if he killed 'her', so what?

He didn't dare think about this, couldn't think about this. His mind had slowly become chaotic, a chaos which approached insanity.

After he used up all of his energy running, he collapsed. When he collapsed, he began to twitch and spasm.

That invisible whip once again began to rain blows on him without stopping. Now, not only all the deities of heaven and demons of hell were punishing him and making him suffer, he himself was tormenting himself as well.

This, at least, he could still do.

The small room was silent.

It seemed as though there was someone speaking outside, but the voice seemed to come from far away. Everything seemed very blurry, very distant. Even he himself seemed to be very far away. But he clearly was here, in this narrow, cramped, stuffy, vulgar little room.

What place, exactly, was this?

Whose room was this?

All he seemed to remember was that before he collapsed, he charged into a narrow alleyway.

He seemed to have come here before. But his memory was very blurred, very distant.

The voices outside suddenly became louder. It was a man talking to a woman.

"Don't forget that we are old lovers. How can you give me the cold shoulder like this?" This was the man's voice.

"I told you, today we can't. I beg you to come again another day, okay?" Although the female voice was imploring, she sounded very adamant.

"Why isn't today suitable?"

"Because...because today, I'm on my period."

"Blow your mother's asshole." The man suddenly became furious. "Even if your period really came, you'd still have to take your pants off and show me."

When a man was at a point where he couldn't give vent to his lust, his temper usually became very bad.

"Aren't you afraid of the smell?"

"I'm not afraid! I f\*\*\*ing have money. I'm not afraid of anything! Here's five silver coins. Why don't you take it first, then take your pants off!"

Five silver coins could solve lust?

Five silver coins could humiliate a girl?

What place was this? What type of world was this?

Fu Hongxue's entire body went cold, as though he had suddenly been sunk into cold water, all the way to the bottom.

He finally remembered what place this was. Finally saw that small ancestral shrine in front of the bed. Finally remembered that girl with the jasmine flowers.

Why did he come here? Was it because she had said to him, "I will wait for you!"

Was it because he was now just like her, without any place to go?

Was it because he had restrained his lust for too long, and this place could let him give vent to it?

Only he himself could answer these questions. But the answers were hidden in the deepest, most secretive recesses in his heart. Perhaps no one would ever be able to pull them out.

Perhaps even he himself could not. He no longer thought about it, because at this moment, a large, drunken fellow charged into the room.

"Ha! I f\*\*\*ing knew you were hiding a man in here. I f\*\*\*ing caught you!"

His large hand had already reached towards Fu Hongxue's bed, but the one he grabbed was not Fu Hongxue, but the girl wearing jasmine flowers.

She had already rushed forward, standing guard in front of the bed. She loudly said, "I won't let you touch him. He's sick."

The big fellow laughed loudly. "Out of all the men you could find, you had to find a sick sot?"

The girl wearing jasmine flowers ground her teeth. "If you insist, I can go somewhere else with you, and I won't even charge you those five silvers. I'll do it for free this time."

The big fellow looked at her, appearing very surprised. "You've always demanded payment first. Why are you willing to do it for free this time?"

She loudly said, "Because I am happy."

The big fellow was suddenly angry again. "Why the f\*\*\* should I care about if you are happy or not? If you're happy, I'm not f\*\*\*ing happy."

He exerted his strength. Like a large eagle snatching a little chicklet, he carried her entire person off.

She did not resist. Because she could not resist, would not resist. She had long since become accustomed to being humiliated by men.

Fu Hongxue finally stood up. "Release her."

The big fellow stared at him in astonishment. "Was it you who spoke?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

The big fellow said, "You diseased sot, did you actually f\*\*\*ing tell me to release her?"

Fu Hongxue nodded. "If I f\*\*\*ing refuse to put her down, what is a diseased sot like you going to do?"

He finally saw the sabre in Fu Hongxue's hand. "Punk, so you have a sabre? Do you dare to kill me?"

Killing. More killing!

Why must men force other men to kill?

Fu Hongxue quietly sat down. He felt as though his stomach was contracting. He almost couldn't resist the urge to vomit.

The big fellow laughed loudly. He was tall, large, and robust. Muscles bulged from his arms. With a light movement, he tossed the girl onto the bed. And then, he gripped Fu Hongxue's clothes, loudly laughing, "Sick bastard, do you think you can be a prostitute's bodyguard? I want to see how many f\*\*\*ing bones you have!"

The girl wearing jasmine flowers shrunk away on the bed, shouting in alarm.

The big fellow was preparing to lift Fu Hongxue up and throw him outside the door.

With a thudding sound, someone was heavily thrown to the ground outside, but it wasn't Fu Hongxue. It was the big fellow who wanted to throw him.

He clambered to his feet, then charged towards him again, slamming his fist towards Fu Hongxue's face.

Fu Hongxue didn't move.

The big fellow clutched his hand, bending his waist in pain so great that cold sweat began to flow. Shouting loudly, he rushed out.

Fu Hongxue closed his eyes.

But the eyes of the girl wearing jasmine flowers were wide open. Shocked, she looked at him, appearing both amazed and admiring.

Fu Hongxue slowly stood up, then slowly walked out. His clothes had already been soaked through with cold sweat.

Restraint wasn't an easy thing.

Restraint is pain. A pain which very few people can understand.



Outside the door, the sunlight was dazzlingly bright. Underneath the light of the sun, his face seemed almost translucent.

Underneath this fresh, brilliant sunlight, what could a person like him do? Where could he go?

He suddenly felt as though there was an unspeakable feeling of dread in his heart. The one he feared wasn't another person. It was himself.

He also feared the sunlight, because he didn't dare to face this dazzling, fresh sunlight. Nor did he dare to face himself.

He collapsed once more.

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## Chapter 18 – When Affection Begins to Thicken, Affection Turns Flimsy

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Fresh, warm, and sweet fluid flowed into his mouth. His convulsing, spasming stomach immediately relaxed and smoothed out, as though it were dry dirt which had gained nourishing water.

Fu Hongxue opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a very white, very small hand. A very white, very small hand, holding a very white, very small soup spoon. One spoonful at a time, it was feeding him a bowl of thick, warm, fragrant, and refreshing soup.

Upon seeing him awaken, a look of pleasure immediately appeared on her face. "This is the chicken broth which I especially requested from the old lady who washes clothes next door. It's dark boned chicken. I hear that it's very effective in replenishing the body. Looks like it really does have a little effect."

Fu Hongxue wanted to shut his mouth, but another spoonful of thick chicken broth once again arrived at his mouth. He simply couldn't resist.

She was still laughing. "Don't you think this is strange? All my life, I've never taken care of anyone else, nor has anyone ever taken care of me."

There was a tiny window in the room. Outside, the sunlight was still as glorious and as bright.

Her eyes had already left Fu Hongxue's face, and she stared foolishly at the sunlight outside.

Although the sunlight was very bright, her eyes were very dark and gloomy. Did she remember all those long-distant memories of times when there was nobody to take care of her?

Those times clearly did not pass underneath the sunlight. Perhaps her entire life, she had never spent a single day underneath the sun.

After a long time, she slowly continued. "Only now do I know that taking care of others or being taken care of is such...such a good thing."

She wasn't a girl who understood many things. She had to think a long time before coming up with the word 'good' to describe her current feelings.

Fu Hongxue understood her feelings. It definitely couldn't be described with the word 'good'. It also included the words 'content', 'peaceful', and 'happy', because she felt as though she was no longer lonely.

She didn't necessarily demand that others take care of her. So long as she had someone to take care of, she would be satisfied.

Fu Hongxue suddenly asked, "What is your name? Your real name."

She laughed again. She liked it when others asked her name. At the very least, this signified that they were treating her as a person.

A real person, an independent person, not someone's tool, nor someone's toy.

Laughing, she said, "My surname is Zhou. I'm called Zhou Ting. In the past, everyone called me Xiao Ting [Little Ting]."

For the first time, Fu Hongxue noticed how pure and sincere her laughter was, because she had already washed off that thick layer of rouge and powder, revealing her own face.

She knew he was looking at her. "When I don't have make up on, do I look like an old granny?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Xiao Ting's laughter became even happier. "You really are a weird guy. I didn't think you'd come and find me."

She wrinkled her forehead. "When you arrived, you looked so scary. I thought you were already dead at first. No matter what I asked you, you didn't seem to notice, but as soon as I touched your sabre, you began to hit."

She looked at the pitch-black sabre in his hand.

Fu Hongxue was silent.

She no longer asked questions either. She had long since become accustomed to others refusing her. She didn't hold any high hopes towards anything. She no longer held any extravagant wishes or made any demands from this unfeeling, cruel world. She didn't even ask his name, because...

"I know that you are a good person, because even though you lightly hit me, you didn't humiliate me like any of the others. You even gave me that much money for no reason."

To her, those things were already a great show of benevolence. It was already enough to make her forever grateful.

"I didn't use any of the money you gave me. Even if I were to buy a chicken every day, it would last a long time, so you must stay here. You have to wait until you are no longer sick before you can leave."

She held his hand. "If you were to leave now, I would be extremely, extremely miserable."

In the eyes of others, she was a base, contemptible woman. For five silver coins, she was willing to sell herself.

But she asked nothing from him at all, only that he allow her to take care of him. That was enough to satisfy her. Compared to those self-styled 'noble' women, who was truly noble? Who was truly base?

She sold herself only because she needed to keep on living. Who didn't want to keep on living?

Fu Hongxue closed his eyes. He suddenly asked, "Do you have any wine here?"

Xiao Ting said, "There's none here, but I can go buy it for you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Fine, go buy some. I won't leave."

Sick people shouldn't drink alcohol.

Why was he going to drink? Was it because there was an irreconcilable pain and worry in his heart?

But alcohol wouldn't solve these problems. What good would wine do him?

She didn't think about any of this.

She rarely thought about many things, nor did she ask for much. As long as he was willing to stay, no matter what he asked her to do, she would do it.

"So long as a person is alive, they should strive with all their might and work as hard as they can. They definitely cannot give themselves up and be hopeless and wallow in vice."

She didn't understand any of these words. She had lived for too long in the morass, and no one had ever given her the chance to crawl out from it.

To her, life wasn't as noble or as complex as others made it out to be.

Life didn't bring much that was good to her. How could it expect too much from her?

Fu Hongxue was drunk. He didn't know for how many days he had been drunk.

When a person is drunk, he would naturally do some unreasonable, bizarre things, but she didn't resent him in the slightest.

He wanted wine, so she bought wine for him, time after time again. Sometimes, she would go knock on the doors of winehouses at midnight. Not only had she never refused him, she didn't even look unhappy.

Only, sometimes she left for very long periods of time, even though the alcohol selling places were nearby.

Fu Hongxue naturally was sober from time to time, but he never asked her why she had been gone for so long.

That day, he had only given her a few broken bits of silver, because that is all he had on him. He had always been poor, just like how he had always been lonely.

But he never asked her where she got the money for his alcohol. He couldn't ask. He didn't dare ask.

She never asked him about anything either, but she said something which he would never forget. One night, when she was a bit tipsy as well, she spoke these words.

"Although I don't understand anything, I know you are definitely in great pain."

Great pain? How could his feelings be summarized with those two words, 'great pain'?

One day, she was exceptionally happy, because it was her birthday. She bought some extra things, and even the extremely rare old hen's meat. But when she returned, he had already gone. He hadn't say a single word before leaving.

The wine bottle lay fallen on the table. It had shattered into many pieces. She stupidly stood in front of the bed, until day turned into night, without even moving.

His hair still remained on the pillow. She picked it up, carefully wrapped it up, tucked it into her bosom, then went out to buy more wine.

Today was her birthday. How many birthdays can one have?

Why couldn't she go and get drunk?

TWO

Fu Hongxue wasn't drunk. He hadn't been drunk for the past two days. He had been walking forward nonstop the entire time, without any objective or direction. He only wanted to leave her far behind, the farther the better.

Perhaps they had already sunken into vice, but he couldn't bear to drag her down with him.

Although parting is always painful, she was still young. No matter how deep the pain, she would soon forget it. Young people always had a

comparatively higher tolerance for pain. If he stayed there, he might never be able to leave again.

After he was tired, he randomly found a place to lie down for a bit, and then he began walking again. He didn't eat a single grain of rice. All he did was drink a little water. His beard had grown long and straggly, and his foul stench could be smelled from far away.

He was punishing himself, punishing himself for all he was worth. He was all but no longer thinking of her, up until the point in time when he noticed that there was a small white handkerchief on his body.

An embroidered handkerchief of pure silk. It was one of her very few luxury items. Inside the handkerchief there was a few silver banknotes worth a not inconsiderable amount of money, and a few pieces of gold. These were also items which had been recovered from the corpse of 'Forefinger'. He had casually put it in his bosom and had long since forgotten about them. During his illness, when he was writhing on the floor, they had fallen out. She had seen them, and so she had wrapped them for him in her most treasured handkerchief. She was willing to sell herself for five silver coins. She was even willing to sell herself for a bottle of wine. But she had never even touched these things. She would rather sell herself than touch his things.

Fu Hongxue's heart was writhing in pain. He suddenly stood up and furiously ran back to her little room.

But she was no longer there.

In front of the house there were many people, all sorts of people. There was even an officer in a red hat.

"What happened here?"

He asked others, but no one paid any attention to him. Fortunately, a drunken beggar took him for one of their own.

"A little whore used to live here, but last night, she ran away, so the officer came to arrest her."

"Why did he come to arrest her? Why did she run?"

“Because she killed someone.”

Killed someone? How could that kind, pitiable girl have killed someone?

“Who did she kill?”

“She killed the owner of that little bar down the street.” The beggar waved a fist. “That fat pig should’ve died long ago.”

“Why did she kill him?”

“She often went there to buy alcohol. At first, she gave money, but she drank too much, to the point where for whatever reason, she didn’t even do business. When she had cravings for alcohol, she had to buy on credit. That fat pig actually sold to her on credit.”

The beggar was laughing. “Because that fat pig didn’t know what she did, he had designs on her. Last night, for whatever reason, she actually ran to that place to drink alcohol by herself. She drank too much. That fat pig naturally was delighted. He thought it was an incredible opportunity. When she was drunk, he tried to force himself on her. No one would have imagined that although she ‘sold smiles’, she simply refused to let that fat pig touch her. She actually pulled out a butcher’s knife on the counter and cut that fat pig’s head in half with one blow.

He still wanted to keep talking, but the listener had disappeared.

The beggar could only bitterly laugh while mumbling to himself, “There’s a bunch of weird stuff in this day and age. A whore who would rather kill someone than take off her pants. Isn’t this ridiculously amusing?”

Naturally, he thought this was extremely funny. But if he knew the truth of the matter, he too most likely would have cried his eyes out on the ground.

Fu Hongxue did not cry, did not shed tears.

The winestore across the street was preparing a funeral. He rushed in, grabbed a pot of wine, wrecked the store, then drank all of the alcohol in one gulp before collapsing in one of the gutters of the alleyway.

For whatever reason, she didn’t even do business.



For whatever reason, she actually ran to that place to drink alcohol by herself, but simply refused to let that fat pig touch her.

Why did she do all of this? Who knows?

Fu Hongxue suddenly loudly screamed, "I know...I know..."

But so what if he knew?

Knowing only made it more painful!

She had already run away, but where could she run off to? At most, she could run from this bog to the next bog. An even filthier bog!

Fu Hongxue wanted to drink even more. He wasn't drunk yet, because he could still think about this.

Who did Mingyue Xin and Yan Nanfei die for?

Who did Xiao Ting run away because of?

He forced himself to crawl to his feet, rushed out of the alleyway, charging out just as a horse galloped by. The horse neighed in shock, and the horseman cursed him out. A whip struck down at him like a poisonous snake.

Fu Hongxue grabbed the whip with the flip of his hand. He was wildly drunk, stinking drunk. He had already tortured himself until he no longer bore any resemblance to a human. But he was still Fu Hongxue.

The rider tugged on the whip with force. No one could seize anything from Fu Hongxue's hand. With a puffing sound, the whip snapped.

Fu Hongxue was still standing, but the rider fell down from his saddle. But his reflexes weren't slow, and so as he fell down, he somersaulted in mid air. The galloping horse continued to charge forward, but he himself had already landed on his feet on the ground. He stared at Fu Hongxue in shock.

Fu Hongxue didn't look at him. He didn't even glance at him. Right now, the only thing he wanted to look at was a pot of wine. A pot of strong wine which would help him forget everything.

And so he passed by in front of this man. His gait appeared clumsy and strange. A strange look suddenly appeared in this man's eyes, as though he had suddenly seen a ghost.

He immediately shouted loudly, "Wait!"

Fu Hongxue ignored him.

That man asked again, "You are Fu Hongxue?" Fu Hongxue still ignored him.

That man suddenly pulled his sword out, then pierced at Fu Hongxue with it. His attack was swift and clever. Clearly, he was one of the faster swordsmen of the martial world. But when his sword was still seven inches away from Fu Hongxue, Fu Hongxue's sabre had already left its sheath.

A flash of sabre light. A splatter of fresh blood. A perfectly good head was split in two.

The man fell. The sabre was sheathed anew. Fu Hongxue didn't even stop his steps, didn't even look at that person.

THREE

It was already very late at night, but there were still plenty of people in this small winehouse, because anyone who came inside was not allowed to leave.

Because Fu Hongxue had spoken. "My treat. All of you drink with me. None of you may leave."

He was carrying the stench of blood on him, and had a large fistful of banknotes and gold. His stench nauseated them, the blood terrified them, but the money made them respect him. So no one dared to leave.

After he drank a cup, everyone present had to drink a cup with him. Two more people entered from outside. He didn't notice in the slightest what type of people they were, but they stared at him. One of them suddenly walked in front of him, then sat down.

"Bottom's up."

He proposed a toast, then drank it in one gulp. Unexpectedly, he still was not looking at this person, not even a glance.

The man suddenly laughed. "Nice alcohol tolerance."

Fu Hongxue said, "Yeah, nice alcohol tolerance."

The man said, "Nice alcohol tolerance, but even better sabre techniques."

Fu Hongxue said, "Nice sabre techniques."

The man said, "You seemed to have once said that any sabre technique which can kill is a good sabre technique."

Fu Hongxue said, "Did I say that?"

The man nodded, then suddenly asked, "Do you know who you just killed?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Did I kill someone just then? Who did I kill?"

The man looked at him, eyes filled with laughter, a laughter which could cause someone to wake up in the middle of the night. "You killed your elder brother-in-law."

Fu Hongxue wrinkled his forehead, as though trying as hard as he could to remember how he might have an elder brother-in-law.

This man immediately reminded him, "Have you forgotten that you are already a married man? Your wife's elder brother is your elder brother-in-law."

Fu Hongxue thought for a long time again, then nodded, then shook his head. He seemed to understand, and yet not understand.

The man suddenly pointed at the person he had come in with. "Do you know who she is?"

It was a woman. She was standing far away at the bar counter, coldly staring at Fu Hongxue.

She was very young and very beautiful, with raven-like hair, and shining eyes. She was the type of daughter which every parent dreamed of having, the type of little sister every man wanted, the type of lover every young man dreamed of. But when she stared at Fu Hongxue, her eyes were filled with hatred and enmity.

Fu Hongxue finally raised his head to look at her. He seemed to recognize her, and yet not recognize her.

The man laughed. "She's your younger sister-in-law."

He was afraid that Fu Hongxue wouldn't understand, and so explained, "Your younger sister-in-law would be your wife's younger sister, and your elder brother-in-law's younger sister."

Fu Hongxue began to drink again, as though he had become confused by those words, and had to drink a cup of wine before becoming sober.

That man asked again, "Do you know what she wants to do right now?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

The man said, "She wants to kill you."

Fu Hongxue suddenly let out a sigh. He mumbled, "Why does everybody want to kill me?"

The man laughed again. "Your words are totally correct. There are thirteen people in this room. At least seven are here to kill you. They want to make their move after you are drunk."

Fu Hongxue said, "Want to wait until I am drunk? How can I get drunk? I can drink for another three days and three nights without getting drunk."

The man smiled. "Since there's no point in waiting for another three days and three nights, it seems they are about to make their move right now."

Just at this moment, with a clanging sound, a pot of wine fell to the floor and smashed to smithereens. A man who was originally holding a wine-cup, now held in his hands a 'mountain-splitting cleaver', with a thick spine and a narrow blade. When he charged towards Fu Hongxue, a white, silk-

tasseled spear, a 'goose plume' sabre, a bamboo-linked whip, and a 'funeral door' sabre all rushed out as well.

The young man wielding a sword growled out in a low roar, "Gang members are taking vengeance. Friends from the martial world, don't interfere!"

Just as he finished these words, he froze with shock. His four friends froze as well. The five of them stood there like stone statues, because the weapons in their hands had...disappeared? Their five weapons were all now in the hands of the person sitting in front of Fu Hongxue.

When they started to move, he had moved as well. With his left hand, he had clapped their shoulders. With his right, he wrested away their weapons. The five of them only felt their vision go blurry, only saw a flicker of a shadow, and the weapons in their hands had disappeared.

The man had already returned to his original seat, gently placing the five weapons on his table. Then, smiling, he said, "I'm not a friend from the martial world, so I can interfere."

The young swordsman angrily said, "Who are you?"

The man said, "I never tell my name to dead people."

The young man said, "Who are the dead people?"

The man said, "You!"

At first, they had been standing there, perfectly fine. But as soon as the man said that word, their five faces turned ghastly pale, feeling as though all of their blood and flesh had suddenly dried. Five vigorous, strong men had suddenly turned withered and thin. Suddenly, they all collapsed.

But Fu Hongxue didn't seem to have seen anything at all.

The man let out a sigh. "I killed these people on your behalf. Even if you aren't grateful towards me, you should at least offer me a few words of praise."

Fu Hongxue said, "Praise you for what?"

The man said, "Can't you tell what type of martial arts I used?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I can't tell."

The man said, "This was one of the sole two types of martial arts from the 'Sorrowful Book of Yin and Yang and of Heaven and Hell Mingling' which still remain in the world."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

The man said, "This is the 'Great Soul-Searching Hand of Severing Heaven and Shattering Earth.'"

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

That man said, "The other remaining technique, is one you have already learned: the 'Great Acupoint Changing Technique of Shifting Heaven and Moving Earth.'"

He chuckled, then said, "For you to be able to shift your acupoints by an inch, you must have mastered at least ninety percent of this technique."

Fu Hongxue said, "And you? Who are you?"

That man said, "I am Duo Qingzi, of the Western Region's Xingxiuhai sect. I'm even more full of affection than you are." [As mentioned in a previous chapter, 'Duo Qingzi' literally means, 'man of great tenderness and affection'.]

Fu Hongxue finally lifted up his head. He looked at him, seeming to only just now know who the person seated before him was.

This man's smile was very warm, very gentle. His eyebrows were delicate and pretty. He really did appear to be a man of great tenderness and affection.

"Even men of great tenderness and affection kill people?"

"When affection begins to thicken, affection turns flimsy. It is precisely because I am so filled with affection that it has become flimsier than paper."

Smiling, Duo Qingzi continued, "However, I have never killed somebody for no reason at all before either."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Duo Qingzi said, "The only reason I killed these people was because I didn't want you to die to them."

Fu Hongxue said, "Why?"

Duo Qingzi said, "Because I want you to die to me."

Fu Hongxue said, "You really want to?"

Duo Qingzi said, "I want to so much, I would die for it."

The girl who was standing far away by the counter suddenly said, "Because if he kills you, I will marry him."

Duo Qingzi said, "Look, I'm already thirty five years old, but I still haven't taken a wife. Naturally, I have no children either. There are three ways one can be unfilial; to not produce an heir is the greatest. You can't expect me to be an unfilial person, can you?"

That young woman interjected, "He won't."

Duo Qingzi said, "How do you know?"

The young woman said, "I've seen him strike on three separate occasions. His sabre originally really did seem to be possessed by ghosts."

Duo Qingzi said, "How about now?"

The young woman said, "Now, the ghosts in his sabre have instead entered his heart."

Duo Qingzi asked intentionally, "Why did they go there?"

The young woman said, "Two things."

Duo Qingzi said, "Wine and women?"

The young woman nodded. "Because of these two things, he had all but died once in the past as well."

Duo Qingzi said, "But he didn't die."

The young woman said, "Because he has a good friend!"

Duo Qingzi said, "Ye Kai?"

The young woman let out a sigh. "Unfortunately, no one knows where Ye Kai has gone."

Duo Qingzi said, "Then right now, he's definitely in a perilous situation?"

The young woman said, "Extremely perilous."

Duo Qingzi said, "Do you think I can receive his sabre blows?"

The young woman chuckled. "You can even capture real ghosts with your 'Great Soul-Searching Hand', much less a sabre which no longer has ghosts in it."

Duo Qingzi said, "Even if I can catch his sabre, wouldn't my hand break?"

The young woman said, "It won't."

Duo Qingzi said, "Why won't it?"

The young woman said, "Because your catching techniques are very clever. Your hand won't even touch the blade of the sabre, and your other hand will have caught his soul."

Duo Qingzi said, "So what you are saying is, this man is doomed?"

The young woman said, "He still has a little bit of hope."

Duo Qingzi said, "What hope?"

The young woman said, "So long as he tells us two things, we won't even touch him."



Duo Qingzi said, "Which two things?"

The young woman said, "Where is the Peacock Plume? Where is the Sorrowful Book of Yin and Yang and of Heaven and Hell Mingling?"

Duo Qingzi said, "If he had the Peacock Plume, or if he had mastered the arts in the Sorrowful Book, we would be doomed."

The young woman said, "Perhaps his hands are no longer steady enough, and he is no longer able to use the Peacock Plume. Perhaps, despite him learning the 'Great Acupoint Changing Technique of Shifting Heaven and Moving Earth', he is not able to learn the other skills."

Duo Qingzi laughed. "Judging by the look of things, he really doesn't seem to be capable of learning other martial arts."

The young woman laughed as well. "Now, the only skill he can train in is drinking."

Duo Qingzi laughed. "But he seems to have trained this skill quite well."

The young woman said, "Unfortunately, the only thing this type of martial arts can do is to turn him into an alcoholic, a dead alcoholic."

Every single word they said was like a needle. They wanted to pierce his heart with every single one of these needles, to make him suffer, to make him weak, to make him collapse. Unfortunately, it seemed as though all of these needles had pierced a stone, because Fu Hongxue didn't react at all. He was already totally numb.

The distance between being numb and collapsing is not great. The distance between collapsing and death is not great either.

Duo Qingzi let out a sigh. "From the looks of it, it seems he's made up his mind not to talk."

The young maiden let out a sigh as well. "Perhaps he is determined to wait until the point of death to speak."

Duo Qingzi said, "Hasn't that point arrived yet?"

The young maiden said, "As soon as you strike, it will have arrived."

Duo Qingzi had already made his move. His hand was both white and delicate, like a woman's hand. His hand movements were soft and graceful, as though he were plucking a flower, a very fragile and tender flower.

No matter how tough and vigorous the opponent, underneath his hands, they would turn as fragile and as tender as a flower.

It seemed as though his hand didn't move very quickly. In fact, it was like a very gentle light. By the time you saw it, it was there.

But this time, before his hand arrived, the sabre left the sheath.

When the sabre light flashed, his hands opened just like a flower. It really did seize that sabre. Was his other hand going to seek out Fu Hongxue's soul? Just like how he had withered the flesh and the blood of those five people earlier!

A flower-petal like hand. A soul-searching hand.

The sabre which no one could catch was actually caught by his hand. Unfortunately, no matter how fearsome the hand, when it came underneath this sabre, it would become as tender and fragile as a flower petal.

Sabre light flashed. Blood sprayed about.

His hand had already been chopped in half. His head had also been chopped in half.

The young woman's eyes widened, but her pupils contracted.

She didn't see the sabre at all. The sabre was already sheathed. It was like how lightning flashed across the dark firmament of the sky. No one could see it afterwards. She could only see Fu Hongxue's deathly pale face.

Fu Hongxue had already stood up and walked over. His gait was still very clumsy and awkward, so clumsy it was terrifying.

He walked very slowly. He was already drunk. So drunk, it was terrifying.

In her eyes, every single place on his body and his every single movement had become unspeakably terrifying. She was so frightened, she felt as though her blood had coagulated. But she suddenly laughed. "Can it be that you no longer recognize me? I am the second young miss of the Ni family, Ni Hui. We are friends."

Fu Hongxue ignored her.

She watched as he walked past her, her eyes still filled with dread. She definitely couldn't let this person stay alive. If he were to live, she would die. Die in his hands.

This conclusion wasn't perhaps correct. Originally, she was an extremely intelligent person, but right now, terror had stolen away her mind. But she hadn't forgotten her 'Celestial Maiden Flowers'. Aside from her, it seemed as though there was no one else in the martial world who could use this vile type of hidden projectile.

Once the hidden projectiles left her hand, not only could the flower petals shoot out and wound, there were lethal poisons hidden within the petals as well.

She only carried thirteen 'Celestial Maiden Flowers' on her, because she simply didn't need to carry too many.

She had only used this hidden projectile a total of three times. Each time, she had only used one petal. One petal is enough to take a man's life.

But right now, she actually shot out all thirteen of the petals, and then her body immediately flew backwards. Even if this strike didn't land, she could at least retreat with her body intact. She always had a great deal of faith in her lightness kungfu.

But at this moment, the sabre had already left its sheath!

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## Chapter 19 – Executioner

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A flash of sabre light. A splash of blood.

She saw the flash of sabre light. She even saw the splashing blood.

The pearls of blood seemed to splash out from between her eyes. When she saw these pearls of blood, it was as though she had seen her own ghost, or seen her two legs leave her body and then give her a kick.

She even felt as though her left eye could now see her right eye.

Who can truly understand her feelings?

Nobody. Only living people can understand other people's feelings. A dead person's head definitely can't hold these thoughts, because it has already been chopped in half. A person whose head had been chopped in half originally shouldn't be able to see anything, unless the sabre was simply too fast. When the sabre blade chopped down, the sense of vision hadn't died yet. She could still see what happened in that split second.

This very last split second.

How long is a split second?

There are sixty split seconds in the snap of a finger. The strange thing was, the last split second before a person dies, they can think of some things which they normally wouldn't think through in an entire day and night.

Right now, nobody knew what she was thinking, and she naturally would never be able to say it.

Ni Ping. Thirty three years of age.

The second son of Ni Baofeng, 'Master of the Pavilion of Hidden Treasure', he wielded a long sword. He was one of the more famous quick swordsmen of the next generation of martial artists.

He was single and had never wed.

After the Ni Family Garden had been destroyed, he often stayed with the famous prostitute, Bai Ruyu, in her 'Courtyard of Jade Fragrance'.

On April 19th, Fu Hongxue killed Ni Ping.

Ni Hui, twenty years old.

The second daughter of the 'Master of the Pavilion of Hidden Treasure', intelligent and resourceful, with extremely high skills in lightness kungfu. She alone practiced the overpowering hidden projectile skill, 'Celestial Maiden Flowers'. She had killed three people.

She was single and had never wed.

On April 19th, Fu Hongxue killed Ni Hui.

Duo Qingzi, thirty five years old.

Originally, his surname was 'Hu'. His background was unclear, but he entered the Xingxiuhai sect in his infancy. Even as a youth, his martial arts proficiency was very high, and the 'Great Soul-Searching Hand of Severing Heaven and Shattering Earth' was one of the seven great Secret Skills of the martial world. He had killed an innumerable number of people.

He was single and had never wed.

Before March had ended, he had evilly killed six married women.

On the night of April 19th, Fu Hongxue killed Duo Qingzi.

Luo Xiaohu, forty years old.

He had robbed and plundered the lands west of the river. He wielded a sabre and thought very highly of himself. He considered himself the best sabre-wielder in the world.

He was single and had never wed.

On April 21st, Fu Hongxue killed Luo Xiaohu.

Yang Wulu, forty four years old.

The cousin of Yang Wuji, 'Master of the White Clouds Temple.' A disciple of the Kunlun sect. He had a very high attainment in the 'Eighteen Stances of the Flying Dragon'. He was very narrow minded, and would definitely take vengeance when slighted. He really rather had Yang Wuji's attitude of 'abstain from nothing when killing'.

He became a Taoist priest when young, and was single.

On April 22nd, Fu Hongxue killed Yang Wulu.

Yin Rudi, thirty years old.

Jin Rumu, thirty three years old.

The two worked together and had killed people without number. They were nicknamed the 'Twin Killers of the Five Elements'. Their martial arts techniques were extremely secretive.

They had very unkind temperaments and were very stingy. By this year, they were fabulously wealthy.

Yin Rudi was a lecher.

Jin Rumu was castrated at birth.

On April 23rd, Fu Hongxue killed Yin Rudi, Jin Rumu.

Zhuge Duan, fifty years old.

He was the Buddhist disciple of Guanxi's 'One Sabred Luo'. He was unfeeling and skeptical, and loved to kill people.

He had long since become a widower.

He had married three times, but all three of his wives had died to his sabre.

No children.

On April 24th, Fu Hongxue killed Zhuge Duan.

'A Flower Branch', Qian Lixiang. Twenty nine years old.

A rapist and an expert in using knockout drugs.

He was single and had never wed.

On April 25th, Fu Hongxue killed Qian Lixiang.

There was a great deal of material left in the thick folder in front of him. It had all been obtained from various places by the two men in front of him.

He only flipped a few pages. Then he no longer read.

One of the two standing in front of him was Gu Qi, him of the black shirt and white socks. The other wore a moon-white monk's robe that was totally spotless. It was the crazy monk from the Ancient Monastery of the Celestial Dragon.

Right now, he didn't seem crazy in the slightest.

His attitude towards the two was very gentle and mild. They, on the other hand, were very respectful towards him, just like how loyal ministers would act towards their monarch.

Although they were standing facing him, there was a very large, very broad table between them.

Regardless of the time or place, he would always keep an appropriate distance between himself and others.

Although his smiling face was very amiable, no one ever dared to annoy him, because he was the most legendary figure in the martial world of this day and age.

He was Gongzi Yu.

The room was tasteful and secluded. Every single item had been selected with the greatest care and placed in the most suitable place. But there weren't many things on the table. Aside from that folder, there was only a long sword wrapped in yellow silk.

From outside the window, the shadows of flowers flickered about. No voices could be heard, and there were only the three of them inside.

When he wasn't speaking, they didn't even dare to breathe too loudly. They all knew that Gongzi Yu liked silence.

The folder was shut.

Gongzi Yu finally let out a sigh. "Why do you always want me to look at these things?"

With two fingers, he gently flicked the folder back to them, as though he were afraid of being contaminated by the bloody acts and murderous aura described within.

Only then did he continue, "Why don't you directly tell me, how many people has he killed over these past few days?"

Wu Hua looked at Gu Qi.

Gu Qi said, "Twenty three."

Gongzi Yu wrinkled his forehead. "Seventeen days, twenty three people?"

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu sighed. "Hasn't he killed just a little too many people?"

Gu Qi said, "It is too many."

Gongzi Yu said, "I hear that your chess buddy, Yang Wuji, also had his hand chopped off by him."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."



Gongzi Yu chuckled. "Fortunately, one can still play chess with his left hand."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "Did Yang Wulu seek out Fu Hongxue in order to get revenge for his cousin?"

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "Luo Xiaohu naturally fought in order to compete to see whose sabre was faster."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "Why did Zhuge Duan kill all three of his wives?"

Gu Qi said, "Because they smiled once at other men."

Gongzi Yu said, "Out of these two people, one thought too highly of himself, and the other was too skeptical of others. Those types of people can do more harm than good. From now on, you must not accept those sorts of people into our organization."

Gu Qi and Wu Hua simultaneously said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu's countenance became mild again. "But I know that their sabre techniques weren't weak."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "The Great Soul-Searching Hand of the Xingxiuhai sect can also be considered a very powerful martial arts technique."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "I hear that Fu Hongxue has always been depressed recently, and has drowned himself in alcohol."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "And yet, none of these experts you sought out were able to block even a single sabre chop of his."

Gu Qi did not dare to open his mouth. He didn't dare to say 'yes' again.

But Gongzi Yu was waiting for him to respond. When he asked a question, the answer must be concise, but there must be an answer. A lack of an answer would be an indication that his question was not worth being taken seriously.

Anyone who didn't take him seriously was guaranteed to receive a suitable punishment.

Gu Qi finally said, "Although he drinks a great deal, his hand is still very steady."

Gongzi Yu said, "Alcohol has no effect on him?"

Gu Qi said, "It has a little effect."

Gongzi Yu said, "What effect?"

Gu Qi said, "When he strikes, he becomes even more vicious than before."

Gongzi Yu was silent, then slowly said, "I imagine he must be very angry. Thus, his sabre has become even more fearsome."

Gu Qi did not ask why. In front of Gongzi Yu, he only answered, never asked.

But Gongzi Yu continued. "Because rage is also a type of power. A power which can compel someone to do many things."

Looking at him, Gu Qi's eyes were filled with admiration and respect.

He never looked down upon his opponents. His analyses and judgements were always correct. His understanding of his opponents was perhaps even deeper than they themselves had.

Thus, he was successful. His success definitely was not due to luck.

Gongzi Yu suddenly asked, "He still waits for others to attack first before drawing?"

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu let out another sigh. "This is the most fearsome point of all. A man who can gain mastery after his opponent launches the first strike is definitely much more fearsome than a man who gains the advantage after taking the initiative."

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "Do you know why?"

Gu Qi said, "Because when one launches an attack, right at the point when he is about to attack but hasn't yet, his power is at the softest point. His sabre severs the opponent's life at precisely that moment."

Gongzi Yu said, "Can anyone else do this?"

Gu Qi said, "They cannot."

Gongzi Yu said, "Why?"

Gu Qi said, "Very few people besides him are capable of seizing that brief, transient moment."

Gongzi Yu smiled. "It seems your martial arts have improved."

Gu Qi said, "Just a bit."

He didn't dare to be too modest. His words were honest. In front of Gongzi Yu, no matter who you are, you must speak the truth.

Gongzi Yu's smile became jubilant. "Do you want to test his sabre and see how fast it is?"

Gu Qi said, "No I don't."

Gongzi Yu said, "You know you aren't his match?"

Gu Qi said, "To my understanding, there are only two people who can stop him."

Gongzi Yu said, "One of them is Ye Kai?"

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu said, "The other one is me?"

Gu Qi said, "Yes."

Gongzi Yu slowly stood up. He walked to the window and pushed the screen open, causing the fragrance of the garden to rush towards his face. He stood there quietly, not moving, not speaking.

Gu Qi and Tu Hua didn't dare to move either.

After a long, long time, he slowly said, "I'm afraid there's something you don't know."

Gu Qi still didn't dare to ask.

Gongzi Yu said, "I don't like killing people. In my entire life, I have never personally killed anyone before."

Gu Qi wasn't surprised. Some people didn't need to personally kill.

Gongzi Yu said, "Nobody can stop him. At most, I can kill him."

Because he himself was like a sabre, a steel sabre. You can break him, but you definitely can't make him bend.

Gongzi Yu said, "But right now, I don't want to make an exception and kill him."

Because he still had misgivings. His incomparably noble, just, and heroic reputation wasn't easily obtained. So he couldn't kill people, and even less could he kill Fu Hongxue.

Because Fu Hongxue wasn't a person whom everybody felt deserved to die.

Gongzi Yu said, "So now, I can only let him kill people. The more he kills, the better."

Let him kill? Until when? Until everybody wanted to kill him, until he went mad.

Gongzi Yu said, "So now, we can still give him some more provocations, and let him kill a few more people."

Turning around, he looked at them. "We can even give him some people to kill."

Gu Qi said, "I will make arrangements."

Gongzi Yu said, "What type of people do you plan to arrange for him to kill?"

Gu Qi said, "The first is Xiao Siwu."

Gongzi Yu said, "Why have you chosen this person?"

Gu Qi said, "Because this person has already changed."

Gongzi Yu said, "I think you can definitely arrange for some more interesting people for him to kill."

Smiling, he slowly continued, "Right now, I've already thought of the most interesting person."

The scent of flowers filled the garden.

His two hands resting on his back, Gongzi Yu strolled about the garden. He was in a very good mood. He believed that his subordinates would definitely complete the task he had given them, a task to kill people.

But he himself never killed people. Never.

A peaceful night. A deep night.

Fu Hongxue couldn't sleep. Although staying awake was painful, falling asleep was even more painful.

When a person is sleeping on a cold, hard wooden bed, with the room filled with the foul, cheap scent unique to all cheap inns, while staring at the shabby, broken down ceiling, he would start to think of those past events which he should not think about.

Wanderers without roots, who can understand your sorrow and your pain?

He would rather have his spirit roam around in the darkness.

Some windows were still lit.

What were the people inside doing? Why hadn't they slept yet? Had a husband and wife awoken from their happy exhaustion, and were making boiled rice stews from leftover dishes from last night's dinner? Was it, perhaps, that the child had awoken in the middle of the night, and so the parents could only light a lamp and help him change his diapers?

Although this lifestyle is simple and dull, the pleasure within it was something which a type of person like Fu Hongxue would never enjoy. Hearing the cries of the child, his heart once again began to ache.

He wanted to drink again.

Although alcohol couldn't solve any problems, it could at least make one temporarily forget them.

A dim light flickered in the alleyway ahead of him.

A tired, depressed old man was drinking alcohol by himself underneath the dim light.

He had already owned a stall here for thirty five years. He was busy very early each morning, purchasing the cheapest of bones to boil stew with, stewing some vegetable dishes which everyone could eat with the alcohol. He would set up his stall at dusk, and keep it open all the way until early morning, before dawn.

In the past thirty five years, his lifestyle had never changed. His sole pleasure was waiting until late night, when the customers were fewest, and then drinking a little wine by himself. Only after drinking a little wine could he enter a world which totally belonged to himself. A peaceful, beautiful

world, a world where there definitely wasn't people who devoured other people. Although this world only existed in his imagination, he thought it was pretty decent. If a man can at least preserve a few illusions, then that would be pretty decent.

Fu Hongxue arrived beneath the dim light.

"Give me two jin of wine."

So long as it would make him drunk, any type of alcohol was fine.

In front of the stall, there were only three shabby, worn-out tables. Only after seating himself did he notice that he wasn't the only customer. There was another, a big, burly fellow who was originally eating a large bowl of noodles and drinking large bowls of wine. But at this moment, he stopped and stared in surprise at Fu Hongxue.

He recognized this pale-faced 'diseased sot'. He once ate some suffering from this diseased sot, in the small room of the girl who wore jasmine flowers.

Feeling a bit tipsy, he actually walked over. Smiling, he said, "I didn't imagine that you liked alcohol as well. For you to be coming out here this late at night and drinking by yourself, you must have really good alcohol tolerance."

Fu Hongxue ignored him.

The big fellow said, "I know that you detest me, but I admire you. You look like a diseased sot, but you are actually a real man."

Fu Hongxue still ignored him. Even if he had thicker skin, he still couldn't not leave, but unexpectedly, Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "Sit!"

Even if a person has long since become accustomed to being alone, sometimes he will still feel very miserable. He suddenly wished that someone could keep him company. Any type of person would do. In fact, the more vulgar, the more ignorant the person, the better, because that sort of person couldn't touch the pain in his inner heart.

But the big fellow looked absolutely delighted, immediately sitting down and calling for alcohol in a loud voice. "Chop another pig's tail and two more duck heads!"

He laughed again. "Too bad the duck heads have already been chopped in half by someone long ago. If I had the chance to do the chopping, I would definitely have done it more neatly and tidier."

The old noodle seller was also a bit tipsy. He glanced sideways at the big fellow. "You often chop off duck heads?"

The big fellow said, "Duck heads, human heads. I often chop off both."

Clapping himself on the chest, he said, "I'm not boasting when I say that my skill at chopping off heads is the best for hundreds of li around."

The old man said, "What is your job?"

The big fellow said, "I am an executioner. My prefecture is county thirteen, and I am the number one executioner. If someone wants me to chop off their head, they at least have to give me a hundred or so taels."

The old man said, "You are going to chop someone's head off, and yet they are going to give you silver?"

The big fellow said, "If they don't give enough, I won't do it."

The old man said, "Based on what?"

The big fellow stretched out his giant palm. "Based on these two hands of mine, and that extremely heavy demon-faced sabre of mine."

He pantomimed chopping someone's head off. "When I chop downwards, sometimes the executed doesn't even know that his head has fallen off."

The old man said, "If they stretch their neck off, they get the axe. If they shrink, they still get the axe. Why should people pay you?"

The big fellow said, "Because a short period of pain is better than a long period of pain. If I am the chopper, they will die cleanly!"



The old man said, "What, so other people aren't able to come up with a way chop heads off with a sabre?"

The big fellow said, "Do you still remember the young fellow I came here with last time?"

The old man said, "How is he?"

The big fellow said, "He's also an executioner. In order to train in this line of work, he used watermelons as heads for practice. He practiced for many years before finally feeling confident. When he came, he didn't think much of me at all."

The old man said, "Afterwards?"

The big fellow said, "It wasn't until the first time he went to the execution ground that he realized something was wrong."

The old man said, "What was wrong?"

The big fellow said, "I'm afraid that even in your dreams, you won't be able to imagine the power, prestige, and killing aura emanated by the execution ground. As soon as he stepped foot on to the execution ground, his two legs went soft. He launched seventeen or eighteen chops, but that prisoner's head was still connected to his neck. He was in such pain, he was rolling around on the floor, screaming as miserably as a butchered pig.

While sighing, he said, "Imagine what it must feel like to have been chopped at seventeen or eighteen times, yet still be alive."

The old man's face had already turned pale. "If you are the chopper, only one chop is needed?"

The big fellow said, "I guarantee that I will do it in one chop. Clean and straightforward."

The old man said, "Can it be that there is a type of learning needed to chop heads?"

The big fellow said, "The learning inherent in this sort of business is very great indeed."

The old man couldn't resist bringing his own alcohol over as well, sitting down to one side. "Tell me. I'll listen."

The big fellow says, "Not only is a deft hand and a quick eye required, you also need to figure out what type of person is being executed."

The old man said, "Why?"

The big fellow said, "Because some people were born with great courage. When the sabre draws near, their spines are still stiff and straight. They won't shrink their neck in either. Chopping this sort of person is the easiest."

With an audience, his words became an even more willing narrator. "But the bones of some people go limp as soon as they step foot into the execution ground. The crotch of their pants is filled with piss and shit, and you can't even pull them up."

The old man said, "Can it be that you can't chop off their heads while they are lying on the ground?"

The big fellow said, "I can't chop."

The old man said, "Why not?"

The big fellow said, "Because the bones at the back of ones neck are very hard. You need to carefully see the joints before you can chop off the head at one blow."

He continued, "If I know that the prisoner being executed is a coward, I need to make preparations first."

The old man said, "Prepare what?"

The big fellow said, "Usually, I'll pour him a few cups of wine first to stir up his courage. But I can't actually get them drunk, so first I need to find out how good his alcohol tolerance is."

The old man said, "And then?"

The big fellow said, "After arriving at the execution ground, if he still doesn't dare to stretch his neck out, I'll give him a kick on his waist. As soon as he stretches his head out, I'll give him the chop, and I'll also need to pull out my long-prepared steamed buns as well, as quickly as possible."

The old man said, "What do you want a steamed bun for?"

The big fellow said, "As soon as his head falls down, I'll stick the steamed bun into his throat."

The old man said, "Why?"

The big fellow said, "Because I can't let the blood which spurts out get onto my body. The size of the steamed bun is perfectly suited for absorbing blood. Even after everyone in the execution ground has left, that steamed bun is still warm. I'll then eat the steamed bun while it is still warm."

The old man wrinkled his forehead. "Why would you eat that steamed bun?"

The big fellow said, "Because eating it can boost one's courage."

He drank another cup of alcohol, then laughed again. "People in our line of business will become terrified after killing too many people as well. At the beginning, we'll only be unable to sleep at night. Towards the end, we might even go crazy."

The old man said, "Truly insane?"

The old fellow said, "My teacher is crazy now. He went crazy after only twenty years of being an executioner. He always says that there are wronged ghosts who seek him for their lives back, who want to chop his head off. One day, he actually stuffed his own head into a furnace."

Looking at him, the old man sighed. "Today, all the alcohol you drank is on the house."

The big fellow said, "Why?"

The old man said, "Because it isn't easy for you to earn money in this way. In the future, you definitely will go crazy as well."

The big fellow laughed loudly. "If you want to treat me, then I might as well drink, but I definitely won't go crazy."

The old man said, "Why not?"

The big fellow said, "Because I like this line of work."

The old man wrinkled his forehead. "You really like it?"

The big fellow laughed. "Other people are violating the law when they kill people. But when I kill people, I earn money. Where can you possibly find such a great bargain as this?"

He suddenly turned his head and asked Fu Hongxue, "How about you? What do you do?"

Fu Hongxue did not respond. His stomach was contracting again, as though he were about to vomit again.

From within the darkness, a cold voice said, "He's the same as you. He's also an executioner."

The long night was almost over.

It is always the darkest before the dawn. This person was standing in the darkest spot.

The big fellow was shocked. "You said that he's also an executioner?"

The shadow within the darkness nodded. "Only, he can't compare to you."

The big fellow said, "In what way can't he compare to me?"

The shadow within the darkness said, "To you, not only is killing somebody very easy, but it's also a very cheerful thing."

The big fellow said, "And him?"

The shadow within the darkness said, "But he feels bitter pain when he kills. He is already no longer able to sleep at night."

At the beginning, we'll be unable to sleep at night. Towards the end, we go crazy.

The big fellow said, "He's already killed many people?"

The shadow within the darkness said, "Not counting those in the past, he's already killed twenty three people in the past seventeen days."

The big fellow said, "When he kills people, does he get paid for it?"

The shadow within the darkness said, "None."

The big fellow said, "Even though he isn't getting paid, and even though he's miserable doing it, he still kills people?"

The shadow within the darkness said, "Yes."

The big fellow said, "Will he keep on killing people in the future?"

The shadow in the darkness said, "Not only will he kill people in the future, he'll kill right now as well."

The big fellow suddenly became tense. "Who is he going to kill right now?"

The shadow in the darkness said, "Me!"

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## Chapter 20 – The Grandmaster and the Zither-Playing Servant

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The world became even darker. The man slowly walked out from the darkness, into the light.

His face was also pale, just like Fu Hongxue's. So white, it was translucent. So white, it was terrifying.

His eyes were very bright, but they carried an indescribable sort of emptiness and melancholy.

The big fellow stared at him in shock. He couldn't help but ask, "If you know he is going to kill you, why did you come?"

The man said, "I must come."

The big fellow said, "Why?"

The man said, "Because I also want to kill him."

The big fellow said, "You must kill him, no matter what?"

The man nodded. "In every person's life, there are a few things he must do which he doesn't wish to, because he simply doesn't have any room for choosing."

The big fellow looked at him, and then looked at Fu Hongxue. He seemed both surprised and perplexed. This sort of affair was something which a person like him would never understand. But he already felt a murderous aura. The few square feet of this stall seemed to have suddenly become an execution ground. In fact, the killing aura was even stronger, even more fearful than that of the execution ground.

The gaze of the man who walked out from the darkness turned to Fu Hongxue. His gaze became even more melancholic.

Men without emotion shouldn't feel this sort of melancholy.

Xiao Siwu used to be a man without emotion.

He suddenly let out a sigh. "You should know that I originally didn't want to come."

Fu Hongxue was still silent. He seemed to have become drunk long ago, numb long ago. Even the hand with which he gripped his sabre seemed to have lost that boulder-like stability it once had. But he still gripped his sabre in his hand, and his sabre had not changed.

Xiao Siwu looked at his sabre. "I believe that sooner or later, there will be a day when I can defeat your sabre."

Fu Hongxue had said long ago, "I will wait for you."

Xiao Siwu said, "Originally, I wanted to wait until that day came before I sought you out."

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "Then you shouldn't have come now."

Xiao Siwu said, "But I am already here."

Fu Hongxue said, "You knew that you shouldn't have come. Why did you still come?"

Xiao Siwu suddenly chuckled. His chuckle was filled with cynicism. "Haven't you done things which you know you shouldn't have done?"

Fu Hongxue closed his mouth.

He had.

There were some things which he knew he shouldn't have done, and yet insisted on doing them. Even he couldn't control himself.

These things had a sort of irresistible lure to them to begin with.

In addition to that, there were things which you know you should not do, and yet the circumstances force you to do them. Even if you wanted to escape, you could not.

Xiao Siwu said, "I've already sought you out three times. All three times, I wanted to kill you, but all three times, you let me go."

Fu Hongxue was silent again.

Xiao Siwu said, "I know that you never wanted to kill me."

Fu Hongxue suddenly asked, "Do you also know why I don't want to kill you?"

Xiao Siwu said, "Because it has been a long time since you faced a true match. You, as well, want to wait for that day and see whether or not I can defeat your sabre."

Fu Hongxue admitted to it.

To be invincible and unconquerable isn't as pleasant a thing as some might imagine. When a man reaches the point of being without an equal opponent, he is even more lonely than being without friends.

Xiao Siwu said, "But I know that you will no longer wait anymore. This time, you will definitely kill me."

Fu Hongxue said, "Why?"

Xiao Siwu said, "Because you are already incapable of controlling yourself."

His eyes were dull and empty. He looked just like a dead man, but his smile was still filled with cynicism. "Because you already are no longer the Fu Hongxue of bygone days."

Now, all you are is an executioner.

He didn't say those words. His dagger had already flown out; fast, accurate, and deadly!



Although he knew that this dagger of his would definitely be defeated by Fu Hongxue, when he struck, he still used all of his strength.

Because he was 'sincere'. At least, his dagger was 'sincere'.

The significance of the word 'sincere' lies in professionalism and precision. The energy to work unflinchingly with perseverance, to not give up any opportunity until the point where all hope is lost, to never abandon the last bit of strength.

It wasn't easy to do this.

Anybody who was capable of doing this would be successful at whatever they do. Unfortunately, he no longer had any opportunities left, because he took a path he should not have taken.

Because Fu Hongxue had already drawn his sabre!

A flash of sabre light. A human head falling to the ground.

Fresh blood sprayed out like a red mist underneath the dim yellow light.

The light turned red, but his face was still pale.

All the blood in that big fellow's body had frozen. Even his breathing seemed to have stopped.

He also used a sabre. He also killed. But now, he had seen Fu Hongxue's sabre. Now, he knew that what he used, couldn't be really be considered a sabre at all.

He even felt that he himself couldn't really be considered to have killed someone before.

The light turned a dim yellow again.

He lifted his head up, and suddenly realized that Fu Hongxue was no longer underneath the light.

The place where there was no light, naturally was the darkness.

“Originally, I really could have spared him. Why did I still kill him?”

Fu Hongxue stared at the sabre in his hand. He suddenly understood why Xiao Siwu had to come!

Because he knew that Fu Hongxue could no longer control himself, he believed he had a chance to defeat Fu Hongxue.

He was impatient to give it a try, so he was already unable to wait for that day.

Waiting was, after all, a very painful thing. He was, after all, still young.

Fu Hongxue’s judgement wasn’t wrong. He himself knew that he wasn’t wrong.

Who was wrong?

Regardless of who was wrong, the pressure and burden in his heart had already become incapable of being lightened, because the person he killed was someone which he definitely would not have killed in the past.

“Can it be that I truly am no longer capable of controlling myself?”

“Can it be that I truly have become an executioner?”

“Can it be that I will go crazy, sooner or later?”

TWO

Not a speck of dust alighted on the table. Not a hint of sound was in the room. Gongzi Yu was deep in thought.

“Xiao Siwu has already gone?” He had just asked that question.

“Yes.”

“What method did you use to induce him to go?”

“We made him believe that he had a chance to kill Fu Hongxue.”

“And the result?”

“And the result was that Fu Hongxue killed him.”

“Xiao Siwu was also the first to strike?”

“Yes.”

Gongzi Yu was deep in thought. The person he was pondering was definitely Fu Hongxue. Only Fu Hongxue was worthy of him deeply pondering.

Aside from Fu Hongxue, there was no one else who was capable of arousing his interest.

Outside the window, it was already deep dusk. The scent of flowers quietly blew about in the night wind. He suddenly chuckled. “He is still killing, still taking lives in one sabre. But he’s almost finished.”

He asked again, “Do you know why he is almost finished?”

He wasn’t looking at Gu Qi, but rather someone standing behind him.

Nobody would notice this person, because he was simply too silent, too peaceful, too ordinary, just like Gongzi Yu’s shadow.

Nobody would pay attention to his shadow, but this question of Gongzi Yu’s wasn’t directed towards Gu Qi. It was directed to him.

Can it be that Gu Qi was not capable of explaining this, but he was? Could it be that he knew more than even Gu Qi?

“When someone is almost finished, they will reveal openings.”

“Openings?”

“Just like the openings which appear when a dam bursts.” Although the example he used was very strange, it was simple and correct.

“Fu Hongxue already has openings?” Gongzi Yu asked again.

“He originally didn’t want to kill Xiao Siwu. He already spared Xiao Siwu three times, but this time he was unable to control himself.”

“This is his opening?”

“Yes.”

Gongzi Yu’s laughter became all the more joyful. “Do we now no longer need to send him people to kill?”

“We can send him one more.”

“Who?”

“Himself.”

The shadow used an even queerer expression. “In all the world, the only person who can kill him is Fu Hongxue, and only Fu Hongxue can kill himself.”

What was even more ruthless than killing?

Forcing someone to kill himself was more ruthless, because the experiences before that are longer and more painful.

A long night. So long, it was frightening.

The long night was already almost over.

Fu Hongxue halted. He looked at the milky white morning fog rise amidst the bamboo and the flowers.

He finally had endured this rather long night. How much longer could he endure?

He was exhausted. Thirsty. Hungry. His head was about to split. His lips were so chapped, they were splitting as well. He didn’t know where he was right now, much less whose bamboo patch this was, whose flowers these were.

He had walked for too long. He stopped here only because there was the sound of zither music.

Empty, ghost-like zither music. It seemed to have arisen out of nowhere, just like the morning fog.

He didn't want to stop here. He didn't know why he stopped here either.

The illusory zither music sounded like a faraway call from a dear one.

He had no dear ones, but he could hear this zither music. His spirit immediately was filled with a strange feeling, and then his entire person merged with the zither music. The bloody affairs of killing suddenly became distant and far away.

This was the first time he felt totally relaxed since he had killed the brother and sister of the Ni family.

Suddenly, with a clanging sound, the zither music ended. From within the small garden, a voice said, "I didn't expect that there would be a good friend appreciating my music outside. Why don't you come in and sit?"

Without even thinking, Fu Hongxue pushed the door open and walked in.

The small garden was filled with luxurious, beautiful flowers and trees. There are three or five humble sheds, and a white-haired old man wearing a grey garment that had already come out to welcome his guest.

Fu Hongxue actually paid him formal respects. "I am an uninvited guest. How dare I trouble you, old sir, to personally welcome me?"

The old man smiled. "It's easy to find an honored guest, but hard to find a friend who appreciates one's talents. If I don't personally welcome you, wouldn't I be a disrespectful person? In that case, how could I study the zither?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

The old man said, "Please enter."

The room was tall and refined. A zither was on the table.

It was a classically elegant zither, appearing to be at least a thousand-year old antique. But part of the zither strings had been scorched.

Fu Hongxue's face changed. "Can this be the legendary zither which has been said since antiquity to be the number one zither in the world, the 'Scorched String' zither?"

The old man smiled. "Sir, you have a fine eye."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then, old sir, would you be Grandmaster Zhong?"

The old man said, "This useless old man truly is surnamed Zhong."

Fu Hongxue bowed deeply yet again. This was the first time he had ever paid such respect to someone. He wasn't actually paying his respects to this person, but to his unparalleled, best-in-the-world zither skills. A lofty, unique skill with the fine arts; a lofty, unique character. All of these should receive the same respect.

The wooden couch didn't have a speck of dust on it. Grandmaster Zhong took off his shoes and walked onto the couch, sitting down on his knees. "You sit as well."

Fu Hongxue did not sit. The blood and filth on his body hadn't been washed off for a long, long time.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Although this useless old man has only one zither and one table in this house, the people who can come in aren't many."

He stared at Fu Hongxue. "Do you know why I invited you in?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Because I can tell that although your clothes are not tidy, your heart and soul are like a bright mirror. Why should you, then, feel a sense of inadequacy or inferiority?"

Fu Hongxue sat down as well.

Grandmaster Zhong smiled. He stroked the zither strings with his hand. With a sweet sound, the ghostly zither melody once more seized Fu Hongxue's soul.

He was still gripping his sabre in his hand, but he suddenly felt as though this sabre was unneeded. This was also the first time he had this feeling. The zither melody seemed to have taken him into an entirely different world, a world without sabres, a world without sin.

Why must men kill men? Not only did they themselves kill people, they forced others to kill people as well.

The hand with which Fu Hongxue gripped his sabre had already loosened. Originally, he really had almost collapsed, but within the zither melody, he freed himself.

Although the sound came from far away, it entered the ears clearly. Just at this moment, a clanging sound suddenly came from far away. It also seemed to be a zither melody.

The hand with which Grandmaster Zhong was playing the zither suddenly trembled. All five of the strings suddenly snapped.

Fu Hongxue's face changed as well. The world suddenly became deathly still. Grandmaster Zhong sat there without moving, seeming totally dejected. He appeared to have suddenly aged ten years.

Fu Hongxue couldn't help but ask, "Grandmaster, did you hear an evil omen?"

Grandmaster Zhong neither heard nor asked. Zither music came from far away again. Cold sweat actually poured down from his forehead. When the zither melody came again, this noble, elegant, lofty old man suddenly jumped to his feet, then rushed out wearing only a set of white socks.

A gust of wind blew by the door. The broken zither strings danced in the wind, as though the spirit of the zither had come to life and wanted to leave with him and see who was playing the zither from afar.

Fu Hongxue left with him as well.

The zither strings snapped. The man aged. It seemed as though even the flowers in this garden had suddenly turned wan and pallid.

Why was this?

THREE

At the end of the long alley was a long street. At the end of the long street was a marketplace.

Right now, it was the morning market. The marketplace was filled with all sorts of people, filled with all sorts of sounds.

The people were all common people. The sounds were all common sounds. What did this refined grandmaster Zhong come here to look for? The previously spotless white socks he was wearing was already covered with mud and grime. He stupidly stood there, gazing hither and to, looking as though he were a young housewife who had lost her purse.

Why would a world-famous zither-god suddenly become like this?

Fu Hongxue originally wasn't a man of many words, but at this moment, he couldn't help but ask, "Grandmaster, what are you looking for?"

Grandmaster Zhong was silent, a strange expression on his face. Only after a long time did he respond, "I am looking for a person, I must find this person."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

Grandmaster Zhong said, "An incomparably elite person."

Fu Hongxue said, "What area is he an elite in?"

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Zither."

Fu Hongxue said, "His zither skills are higher than your own?"

Grandmaster Zhong let out a long sigh. Gloomily, he said, "One sound from him is enough to make me never again dare to touch the zither."



Fu Hongxue's features couldn't help but change. "Grandmaster, do you already know where he is?"

Grandmaster Zhong said, "The zither sound came from here. He should be here as well."

Fu Hongxue said, "This is only a marketplace."

Grandmaster Zhong sighed. "It is precisely because this is a marketplace that he is able to display his real abilities."

Fu Hongxue said, "Why?"

Grandmaster Zhong's gaze was far away, as though he had lost something but also gained something. "Because although he himself is in a vulgar, common place, his heart is far away amongst the clouds. The tens of thousands of vulgar, common things in the world can no longer stir his clear, water-like heart."

Fu Hongxue was silent. He slowly raised his head, then suddenly said in a loud voice, "Grandmaster, can he be the person you are speaking of?"

There was a butcher's stall in the marketplace.

No matter what type of marketplace it was, there would be a butcher's stall.

Where there was a butcher's stall, there would be a butcher.

All butchers feel themselves to be out of the ordinary, believing themselves to be nobler than the other street peddlers.

Because they can kill. Because they aren't afraid to bleed.

This butcher was in the middle of chopping meat. There was a very large butcher's block next to the meat, and beneath the block there was a man resting.

A lazy-looking man in white.

The ground was both wet and filthy. Many married women bought vegetables here while wearing spiked shoes. But this person didn't care. He

lazily rested in the middle of the muddy ground. On his knee, there was a zither.

He seemed to be playing the zither, but the zither produced no sound.

Grandmaster Zhong had already walked over to him. He respectfully stood in front of him, then bowed to the ground.

But this man was looking at his hand. He didn't even lift his head.

Grandmaster Zhong's expression became even more solemn and respectful. He actually referred to himself as a 'student'. "This student is named Zhong Li."

The man in white dully said, "Can it be the god of zither music, Grandmaster Zhong?"

Cold sweat suddenly emanated from Grandmaster Zhong's face. He haltingly said, "Noble sir, when you touched the strings of your zither, you shocked and overawed the world. Why have you stopped playing?"

The man in white said, "I am afraid."

Grandmaster Zhong was astonished. "Afraid? Afraid of what?"

The man in white said, "I am afraid that you will commit suicide by ramming your head against that 'Scorched String' zither of yours."

Grandmaster Zhong's head sunk. Sweat fell down like rain, but he couldn't help but ask, "Noble sir, do you come from afar?"

The man in white said, "I come from afar, but know not where I go."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Dare I ask for your honorable name?"

The man in white said, "No need to ask me. I'm just a zither-playing servant."

A zither-playing servant? A man like this would be a zither-playing servant to someone else? Who was worthy of having an apprentice such as this?

Grandmaster Zhong couldn't believe it. This truly was unbelievable for him. He couldn't help but ask, "Based on your great talent, noble sir, how could you place yourself beneath another?"

The man in white dully said, "Because I've always been inferior to him."

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "Who is he?"

The man in white chuckled. "Since I know who you are, you should know who he is."

Fu Hongxue gripped his sabre tightly again. "Gongzi Yu."

The man in white laughed. "You really do know."

Fu Hongxue suddenly struck out like lightning, seizing his hand. Who would have imagined that Grandmaster Zhong would rush forward and tightly grasp Fu Hongxue's arm. He loudly shouted, "No matter what, don't hurt his hands! This is an incomparable national treasure, the hands of a true grandmaster!"

The man in white laughed loudly. The butcher chopping the meat suddenly chopped his knife at the crown of Fu Hongxue's head.

A vegetable peddler by the side of the butcher also used a weightbeam as an acupoint sealing device to attack, striking at Fu Hongxue's 'Qimen', 'Jiangtai', and 'Xuanyang' acupoints.

The housewife carrying a vegetable basket also attacked, using the vegetable basket to cover Fu Hongxue's head.

From behind, a peddler carrying two chickens on a carrying pole walked over as well. He actually pulled off his pole and used it to strike at Fu Hongxue's waist.

Suddenly, a flash of sabre light. With a swishing sound, the pole was shattered, the vegetable basket disintegrated, the weightbeam was cut in half, and a butcher's knife suddenly flew out, with a bloody hand attached to it.

The chickens and the ducks in the cage flew out. The marketplace became as chaotic as a pot of freshly made gruel.

The man in white beneath the chopping board had already disappeared.

A crowd of people gathered. The butcher, the vegetable peddler, the housewife, and the chicken seller had all disappeared into the crowd. But the zither melody could still be heard from far away.

Fu Hongxue parted the crowd and walked out. Outside of the crowd, there was still more people, but none of the ones he was looking for. However, he had already heard the zither melody.

Where the zither melody was coming from was where he was going. He didn't walk very quickly. This seemingly entirely imaginary zither melody couldn't be caught by anyone. What's the point of walking quickly?

But he didn't give up. So long as the zither melody was ahead of him, he would keep walking forward. Grandmaster Zhong actually followed from behind. His snow-white stockings were ruined now. Even his two feet seemed to be ruined. No one knew how long they had been walking.

The sun began to rise. They had long since left the market, left the city. The gentle spring wind blew across the lush seedlings in the fields. From far away, the mountains rose and undulated, and the earth was as gentle and warm as a virgin's chest. They had entered 'her' embrace.

There were green hills in all directions and water everywhere. The zither melody seemed to come from the deep mountains and the watery depths.

The mountains were now deep, and the flowing water had stilled. There was a small log cabin next to a small lake.

There was a zither and a table in the cabin, but nobody there.

The zither strings still seemed to be quivering, and beneath the zither there was a short letter:

The sabre reveals openings, the zither strings snap,  
The moon has fallen, the flowers have withered.

The young master [Gongzi] is like a dragon,  
Hovering above the nine heavens.”

#### FOUR

The empty hills were silent.

Grandmaster Zhong faced the faraway mountains. He was silent for a long, long time, before slowly saying, “This really is a good place. Those who don’t want to leave can stay. Those who cannot leave, why leave?”

Fu Hongxue looked at him from far away, waiting for him to continue.

Grandmaster Zhong was silent for another long period of time. “I no longer intend to leave.”

Fu Hongxue said, “Do you not wish to go, or are you unable to go?”

Grandmaster Zhong didn’t reply. Instead, he turned to look at him. Facing him, he asked, “How old do you think I am?”

His head was filled with white hair, and his face was filled with the marks and scars of having lived an exhausting life. He looked weary and old, older than when Fu Hongxue had first seen him.

He answered his own question. “I was famous when I was young. This year, I’m only thirty five years old.”

Fu Hongxue looked at his tired face and his white hair. Although he did not speak, he couldn’t help but appear shocked.

Grandmaster Zhong chuckled. “I know I look very old. I’ve had white hair for many years now.”

His chuckle was filled with agony. “Because I have already exhausted all of my life’s energy. Although I have gained an amount of comfort and fame from the zither which others cannot even imagine, the zither has also swallowed up all of my marrow and my blood.”

Fu Hongxue understood his meaning. If a person became totally involved in one thing, it was as though he had made a pact with demons.

Everything you want, I will give you. But you must give me everything you have as well, including your life and your soul.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Originally, this was a fair trade. I didn't have any cause for complaint. But now..."

He stared at Fu Hongxue. "You study the sabre. If you were like me, and had given up everything for your sabre, but then suddenly discovered that someone could defeat you using a single flick of the finger, how would you feel?"

Fu Hongxue didn't answer.

Grandmaster Zhong let out a sigh, then slowly said, "Naturally, you won't understand this. To you, a sabre is only a sabre. It doesn't have any other meanings."

Fu Hongxue wanted to laugh, laugh loudly. But he naturally couldn't laugh.

A sabre is only a sabre? Who could imagine the meaning which this sabre held for him? Hadn't he also made a pact with demons, hadn't he also given up everything? What did he get in return?

Aside from him, perhaps there was nobody else in the world who understood this better. But he didn't speak. His suffering had entered his very bones. He couldn't even vomit it out.

Grandmaster Zhong chuckled again. "But no matter what, since we can meet each other, it must be destiny. I want to play another song for you."

Fu Hongxue said, "And then?"

Grandmaster Zhong said, "And then, if you want to leave, you can leave."

Fu Hongxue said, "Won't you leave?"

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Leave? Where can I leave to?"

Fu Hongxue finally fully understood his meaning. This was a good place. He had already intended to be buried here. To him, life was no longer a glorious thing. It was shame. He already had no purpose in life.

With a strumming sound, the zither music started again.

It was already dark outside. The darkness was like a fine gauze covering the mountain valley.

The zither melody was mournful, as though an ancient, beautiful white palace was telling a story of the misery of mankind.

Although in life, there would always be joy, it was always just momentary and fleeting. Only tragedy was eternal.

A person's life was a very short thing to begin with. Regardless of who you are, you wouldn't be able to avoid death eventually.

For what purpose did people live?

Why must they struggle and fight? Why must they be miserable and unhappy? Why is death the only eternal, peaceful answer to unanswerable questions?

And then, the zither began to speak of the beauty and peace of death, a beauty and peace which no one could ever describe using words. Only his zither music could express it.

Because he himself had sunk into a beautiful dream of death.

The death god's hand seemed to be guiding his in playing the zither, coaxing men to give up everything and be forever peaceful in the dreamlands of death.

There, there was neither pain nor struggles against other men.

There, not only was there no killing, there was also no men forcing other men to kill.

This definitely was something which no one could resist.

Fu Hongxue's hand was already starting to tremble. His clothes had already been soaked with sweat as well. Since life was so tragic, why must a man continue to live?

The hand with which he gripped his sabre became even tighter. Was he preparing to draw his sabre? Who was he going to kill with the sabre?

The only person who can kill him is Fu Hongxue, and only Fu Hongxue can kill himself.

The zither music became even more tragic. The mountain valley became even darker.

There was no light. There was no hope.

The zither music seemed to be calling out to him. And he seemed to see Yan Nanfei and Mingyue Xin, their faces filled with smiles and laughter.

Were they already at peace? Were they advising him to accept that peace and beauty? Fu Hongxue finally drew his sabre!

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## Chapter 21 – Emerging From the Cage

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A flash of sabre light. But what it chopped wasn't a human head. It was the zither strings!

Why did he chop the zither strings in half?

Grandmaster Zhong lifted his head up, staring at him in shock. Not just shock. Anger.

The sabre had been sheathed again. Fu Hongxue had already sat down. In the darkness, his pallid face appeared as though it had been cut out of marble. Firm. Callous. Noble.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Even if my zither music is not pleasing to your ear, the zither is blameless. Sir, why don't you directly chop my head off?"

Fu Hongxue said, "The zither is blameless, but the man is blameless as well. It is better for the zither to snap than for the man to perish."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "I don't understand."

Fu Hongxue said, "You should understand. But there really are many things which you don't understand."

He coldly continued, "You make others realize how short life is, how death is unavoidable. But you don't know that there are many ways of dying."

Death could be both lighter than a feather as well as heavier than Mt. Taishan. How could Grandmaster Zhong not understand this?

Fu Hongxue said, "Since a person is alive, even if he must die, he must die with glory and honor, before he can die at ease."

If a person cannot do well that which he likes to do in life, how can he die at ease?

The meaning of life always lay in struggling and fighting to endure. Only when you understand this point will your life no longer be meaningless. The sufferings of mankind await mankind to solve for itself.

“But my life is now nothing but shame.”

“Then you should think of a way to do something meaningful, something to wash away your shame. Otherwise, even if you die, you will still die shamefully!”

Death cannot solve any problems. Only cowards who can't handle setbacks will use death to escape.

“I definitely have not given up any less of myself to this sabre than you have to your zither. However, I haven't gained the comfort and the glory which you have gained. All I have gained is hatred and scorn. In the eyes of others, you are a god of the zither, but all I am is an executioner.”

“But you are still going to continue living?”

“So long as I can keep on living, I will definitely keep on living. The more others want me to die, the more I want to keep on living.” Fu Hongxue said, “Life isn't necessarily shame. Death is!”

Light shone from his pale white face, making him seem all the more dignified and noble. An almost godlike nobility.

He was no longer that poverty-stricken, blood-splattered, frustrated executioner. He had already found the true meaning of life. He had found it from another person being unable to endure the travails of life! Because the more powerful the attacks another launched on him, the more powerful his counterstrike was. The power from this counterstrike of his finally enabled him to release himself from the cage he had put himself into! Gongzi Yu definitely had never imagined this happening!

Grandmaster Zhong had never imagined it either. But as he watched Fu Hongxue, the shock and anger in his eyes disappeared. There was only esteem left.

A lofty, unique character was as worthy of respect as a lofty, unique skill with the fine arts.

He couldn't help but ask, "Do you also want to do a meaningful thing which will wash away your shame?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I am trying my hardest as we speak."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Aside from killing people, what else have you done?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I have at least proved to him that I have not surrendered, nor have I been defeated by him."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Who is he?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Gongzi Yu."

Grandmaster Zhong let out a long sigh. "For a person to have a zither-playing servant such as that man, he must be an extraordinary character!"

Fu Hongxue said, "He is."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "But you want to kill him?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Killing is also a meaningful act?"

Fu Hongxue said, "If this man remains alive, others shall be miserable and be coerced and bullied. In a case such as this, my killing him is a meaningful act."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Why haven't you done this yet?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I can't find him."

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Since he is an extraordinary character, he must be very famous. Why can't you find him?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because although his name is famous all the world over, very few people have a chance to see his real face."

This was also very strange. The more famous a person was, the fewer the people who could actually meet him.

This point, at least, Grandmaster Zhong should understand. He, too, was famous all the world over, but there were very few people who could meet him.

But he didn't say anything. Fu Hongxue didn't want to continue speaking either. All the words that should have been spoken, were spoken.

Fu Hongxue rose to his feet. "I only want to let you know that although this is a good place, this isn't the place where we should stay."

Thus, the outside was totally dark, he didn't want to stay. As long as his heart was bright and guileless, why fear the darkness? He slowly walked out. Although his walking gait was still as clumsy and ugly as ever, his spine was as stiff and straight as a ramrod.

Grandmaster Zhong looked at his departing back. He suddenly said, "Wait."

Fu Hongxue halted.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "Do you truly want to seek out Gongzi Yu?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Grandmaster Zhong said, "In that case, you should stay here. I'll leave."

Fu Hongxue's features changed. "Why? You know that he will come here?"

Grandmaster Zhong did not respond. Instead, he hurried out in front of Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue said, "How do you know? Who, exactly, are you?"

Grandmaster Zhong suddenly turned and looked back at him, chuckling. "Who do you think I am?"

His smile was strange and mysterious. His body suddenly disappeared into the darkness, becoming one with the night.

Only his voice could be heard coming from afar. "As long as you wait here patiently, you will definitely find him."

"Who do you think I am?"

Can it be that he wasn't the real Grandmaster Zhong? Was he actually Yu Qin? Otherwise, how would he know about Gongzi Yu's travel information?

Fu Hongxue couldn't be sure. He had never seen the real Grandmaster Zhong, nor had he seen Yu Qin.

Was Gongzi Yu truly going to come here? He couldn't be sure of this either, but he had already decided to stay. This was his only lead. No matter what, he couldn't let it slip.

The night became even darker. No sound could be heard in the empty mountains. No sound at all is actually a very terrifying sound. It would actually become difficult for a person to sleep under these circumstances.

Fu Hongxue had already lain down, but lying down wasn't the same as falling asleep. There were no lights in the small cabin. Aside from a zither, a table, and a couch, there was nothing in the room at all. He was hungry and tired. He very much wanted to sleep. Over the years, the pain of insomnia had tormented him greatly. A peaceful night's sleep was already a luxurious extravagance for him. Why was it so quiet? Why wasn't there even the sound of the wind? There was only the sound of him coughing a few times. He even wanted to begin talking to himself, saying a few things to himself. Just at this moment, he suddenly heard a clanging sound in his dreams.

It was zither music! The zither was on the table in front of him. Aside from him, there was no one else in the room.

No one was playing the zither. How could it make music?

Fu Hongxue only felt a cold feeling rise up his back. He couldn't resist turning around and staring at the zither on the table. Cold starlight was shining on that zither.

The zither sounded again. A 'gong' note, followed by a 'shang' note, a 'gong' note, a 'chi' note, a 'gong' note, and a 'yu' note.

Who was strumming the zither strings? Was it the spirit of the zither? Or was there a ghost in the room?

Fu Hongxue suddenly jumped up and saw a faint black shadow outside the window. Was it a human shadow, or a spectre? If a man was outside the window, how could he strum the zither on the table? Fu Hongxue laughed coldly. "Excellent finger strength."

The shadow outside the window seemed to be startled. It quickly retreated.

Fu Hongxue was even quicker. He didn't seem to prepare to move at all, but his body had already shot out.

The person outside the window somersaulted into the air, disappearing into the darkness.

The blank mountains were lonesome. The dark night was cold and silent. Fu Hongxue went forward for a bit longer, but couldn't see anybody. But when he turned around, he saw a light.

The light flickered like a will'o'wisp. The light was in the window. Who lit a light in the room?

Fu Hongxue stopped using his lightness kungfu. He slowly walked back. The candle light didn't disappear. It was right on the table. But the zither on the table had been broken, broken perfectly and evenly in half, as though it had been severed by a sharp blade.

There was no one in the room, but there was a short note pressed underneath the zither.

"If you do not leave by this evening, you shall become broken like this zither."

The words were written very well, very elegantly. It was clearly authored by the same person who left the first note beneath the zither earlier.

Where did he go?

Fu Hongxue sat down. He faced the severed strings and the lonely light. His eyes suddenly shone with light as well. Only ghosts could come and go so

easily and quickly. He never believed in ghosts. If there were no ghosts in the world, then this room must have hidden tunnels and false walls. Quite possibly, they were right in front of them. He couldn't be considered an expert in this field, but he understood it. He knew a little about all of the various tricks and schemes which existed in the martial world. Although the study of secret mechanisms is a very complicated one, it wouldn't be too difficult to discover a false wall or an underground tunnel in such a small cabin.

Had Gongzi Yu already arrived? Did he come from the tunnel?

Fu Hongxue closed his eyes and held his breath. First, he let his heart calm down. Only then could his senses become truly keen. And then, he started to search.

He couldn't find anything.

If you do not leave by this evening, you shall become broken like this zither.

If I can't find you, you will find me. Why shouldn't I just wait for you here, and see how you intend to break me like the zither?

Fu Hongxue slowly sat down, making the lantern slightly brighter. Light could always stir a man to wakefulness and vigor. Sleep and him simply were not destined to be.

Sometimes, he couldn't fall asleep when he wanted to. Sometimes, he wanted to sleep but must not sleep.

The man who broke the zither could once more enter from via the secret tunnel at any time and break him like a zither!

Was this person Gongzi Yu or not? What type of person was Gongzi Yu?

Fu Hongxue tightly gripped his sabre in his hand, that pitch-black sabre. He lowered his head, staring at his sabre. He felt as though he himself were slowly sinking down, sinking down into that pitch-black sheath. He suddenly fell asleep.

The night was deep and dark. A single light. Heaven and earth seemed at peace, without calamity, without blood, without sound.

When Fu Hongxue woke up, he was still perfectly seated on the chair. He didn't know for how long he had been asleep. The first thing he did when he awoke was look at his sabre. The sabre was still in his hand. The pitch-black sheath glimmered with light underneath the lantern. Perhaps he had simply closed his eyes and dozed off for a moment. He was simply too tired. He wasn't a man made from iron, after all. This sort of thing was hard to avoid. So long as his sabre was still in his hand, he feared nothing. But by the time he lifted up his head, he sunk down again, sunk down into an icy lake. He was still on the chair, his sabre was still in his hand, but he was no longer in that crude cabin in the mountains.

The first thing he saw was a painting, a four-foot, seven inch long painting, suspended from the wall in front of him.

This room naturally wasn't only four-feet, seven inches wide. Aside from this painting, the snow-white walls also had all sorts of weapons hanging down from it. Amongst them were giant stone weapons which men had used to hunt with, in the times before copper and iron were discovered. There were weapons which soldiers had used during the Warring States period, such as pikes and lances. There was the 'Green Crescent Blade' which the legendary war god, Guan Yu, had used. There were also extremely rarely seen weapons of the martial world, such as curved scimitars and tiger-straddling baskets.

But the most common weapon was still the sabre.

Broadswords, double sabres, goose-plume sabres, demon-headed sabres, golden-spined mountain cleavers, Buddhist monk's sabres, nine-ringed sabres, violet fish-scale sabres...it seemed as though there was even an extremely long Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch.

But what shocked Fu Hongxue the most was that there was also a pitch-black sabre! It looked just the same as the one he wielded. The hundreds and thousands of weapons actually hadn't yet filled the wall. From this, one can imagine how large the room was. But the floor was covered with a very complete velvet carpet, making the room seem undescribably warm and comfortable. Everything in the room had been selected with the greatest care. In his entire life, Fu Hongxue had never been in such a magnificent, luxurious place.

Right now, he wasn't sure how he had arrived here. This wasn't a dream, but it was much more bizarre and absurd than the bizarrest, absurdist of



dreams. His sabre-gripping hand was ice cold. The hilt had been soaked by the cold sweat from his palm.

But he didn't cry out in alarm, nor did he run away. He still quietly sat in this chair, not even moving. Someone was able to quietly, stealthily bring him to this place. Naturally, it would have been easy to kill him. Since he was still living, why flee? Why move?

From outside the door, someone loudly laughed, "Young master Fu, what good self-control you have!"

The door opened. The one who laughed loudly was actually Grandmaster Zhong.

Only, this Grandmaster Zhong's appearance had changed a bit. The cloth robes he had worn were now replaced by a golden mantle, his white hair had darkened somewhat, and his wrinkles had lessened somewhat as well. He looked at least ten or twenty years younger.

Fu Hongxue only coldly glanced at him, not showing the slightest bit of surprise, as though he had long since calculated that this person would be here.

Grandmaster Zhong bowed to the floor. "This humble one is Yu Qin. I pay my respects to young master Fu."

So he was Yu Qin. So he was Gongzi Yu's Yu Qin. The zither-playing servant in the marketplace was nothing more than an actor playing a minor role. That play had been put on for Fu Hongxue's benefit. Fu Hongxue had never seen the real Yu Qin. Naturally, that play had seemed extremely real. Could it be that the entire purpose of that play was to get Fu Hongxue to listen to that heartrending music, to make him feel downcast and to pull out his sabre and chop his own head off? Right now, if he were to draw his blade, he naturally wouldn't be cutting his own neck.

Seeing the sabre in his hand, Yu Qin stopped far away. He suddenly said, "What is this place? How did I get here?"

He chuckled, then continued, "These two questions should have been asked by young master Fu. But since you do not intend to ask, then it falls upon me to ask."

He asked the questions. Naturally, he would answer them as well.

Unexpectedly, Fu Hongxue coldly said, "This is a good place. Since I am already here, why would I need to ask too many questions?"

Yu Qin was startled, then said, "Young master Fu, you really do not wish to ask?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Yu Qin looked at him. Hesitatingly, he said, "Young master Fu, do you want to kill me with a chop of your sabre, then leave through this door?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Yu Qin said, "Can it be that you don't wish to leave, young master Fu?"

Fu Hongxue said, "It wasn't easy for me to get here. Why would I leave?"

Yu Qin was startled yet again. When he entered, he originally thought that it would be difficult for Fu Hongxue to resist being startled or frightened. Unexpectedly, the one who ended up consternated was himself.

Fu Hongxue said, "Sit down."

Yu Qin actually sat down. There was a white jade table next to the carved wooden chair. There was a zither on top of the table. It was the legendary, incomparable zither left behind from antiquity, the 'Scorched Strings' zither.

Fu Hongxue said, "Please play a melody for me to listen to."

Yu Qin said, "Alright."

With a clanging sound, the zither music arose. Naturally, he was no longer playing that sort of music which would make the listener feel cold and filled with grief. The zither music was filled with joy and happiness, riches and honor. Even people who simply could no longer keep on living would no longer want to die after hearing this melody. He himself, naturally, didn't want to die either.

Fu Hongxue suddenly asked, "Gongzi Yu is here?"

Although Yu Qin did not respond, the sound of his music seemed to whisper, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue asked, "Does he also wish to meet me?"

The zither music once more carried an answer with it. "Yes."

Fu Hongxue was originally a friend who appreciated his music. He wanted to continue to inquire, but a very strange noise suddenly came in from outside. Monotous, abrupt, shrill, and terrifying. One sound after the other, it rang out without stopping.

Yu Qin's hand trembled. Two strings on the zither suddenly snapped. This abrupt, shrill sound carried within it an indescribable, fear-inducing sensation. No matter who heard this sound, they would feel their throat becoming dry, their heart rates elevate, and their stomachs contract. Not even Fu Hongxue was an exception.

Yu Qin's face changed. He suddenly stood up and quickly strode out.

Fu Hongxue did not stop him. He never did things that were unnecessary. He had to conserve his energy, using all of his strength to keep himself calm and collected.

The weapons on the wall sparkled with cold light. That four-foot, seven-inch long painting on the wall was definitely a masterpiece as well. But he didn't even spare it another glance. He definitely could not spare any attention to anything else. But he wasn't able to fully concentrate all of his strength. That abrupt, shrill noise continued to cry out without stopping, as though it were an iron hammer repeatedly clanging against his mind. It wasn't until the sound of a door opening was heard that he noticed there was a door behind him. A beautiful woman, dressed in white, was staring at him from outside the door. She actually seemed to be Zhuo Yuzhen. And yet, she was not Zhuo Yuzhen.

She was far more beautiful than Zhuo Yuzhen, so beautiful, pure, and noble. Her smile was warm and refined, and her graceful bearing was even more stirring. Even Fu Hongxue couldn't resist tossing a few extra glances her way.

She already walked inside. She gently closed the door, then walked past Fu Hongxue's form. She walked to the center of the great hall before turning to face him. Smiling, she said, "I know you are Fu Hongxue, but you definitely don't know who I am."

Her voice was just like her person; noble and graceful. But her words were very frank and candid. Clearly, she wasn't one of those affectedly bashful women.

Fu Hongxue did not know who she was.

But she had already told him. "My surname is Zhuo. I can be considered the mistress of this place. Thus, you can call me Madame Zhuo. If you feel this manner of address is too vulgar, you can call me Zhuo Zi." [There is a pun here; her surname, 'Zhuo', sounds just like the word for 'table'. Zhuo Zi literally means 'Table'.]

Smiling, she continued, "My nickname is 'Table.' My friends all like to address me by this name."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "Madame Zhuo."

He wasn't her friend. He had no friends.

Madame Zhuo naturally understood his meaning. And yet, she was still smiling cheerfully. "No wonder everyone says you are a weirdo. You really are."

Fu Hongxue himself admitted to it.

Madame Zhuo's eyes roamed about. "Don't you want to ask me what relationship I have with Zhuo Yuzhen?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I do not."

Madame Zhuo said, "Can it be that there really is nothing in the world which can move your heart?"

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth. If he didn't want to say a single word in response, he would immediately shut his mouth, very tightly.

Madame Fu sighed. "Originally, I thought that you would at least glance at these weapons. Everyone who has ever visited here have all been very interested in these weapons."

These weapons truly were masterpieces. It definitely wasn't easy to collect all of these weapons. It wasn't easy to have a chance to see them either. Very few people who practiced martial arts would be willing to pass up such an opportunity.

She suddenly turned around and walked towards the wall. She removed a simple, unsophisticated metal sword which was heavy and black. "Do you recognize whose sword this was?"

Fu Hongxue took one glance, then immediately said, "This is the sword Guo Songyang used."

Originally, he didn't want to speak, but he couldn't resist speaking. He couldn't allow her to consider him an ignorant person.

Madame Zhuo smiled. "You truly do have good eyesight."

There wasn't too much praise hidden within these words. In past years, the Solar Apex Sword travelled the martial world with ease, and was ranked number four in the Book of Weapons. There truly were only a few people who did not recognize this sword.

Madame Zhuo said, "Although this is just a replica of the original, its shape, weight, length, and even the metal used to smelt it are definitely the exact same as that of the Solar Apex Sword of years past."

She couldn't help but reveal a sense of self-satisfaction in her laughter. "Even the tassel on the sword was personally made by the grand-aunt of the Guo family. Aside from the metal sword which they pass down from generation to generation, I'm afraid that in all the world, there's no other sword like this one!"

She hung the sword back on the wall, then took off a long whip. Dark light gleamed from it, making it look just like a nimble serpent.

Fu Hongxue said, "This was used by Ximen Rou. The Serpent Whip of the God of Whips, ranked seventh on the Book of Weapons!"

Madame Zhuo laughed. "Since you recognized the whip, I am sure you recognize Zhuge Gang's Diamond Crutch as well."

She hung up the long whip, then removed a pair of meteor hammers which were next to the Diamond Crutch.

Fu Hongxue said, "The Twin Comets of Wind and Rain. Ranked thirty fourth on the Book of Weapons."

Madame Zhuo said, "Good eyesight."

This time, there was somewhat more praise in her tone. She suddenly walked to the corner of the room and removed two metal hoops. "In the past, the Golden Coin clan dominated the martial world. Their chief, Shangguan Jinhong, shook the world with his strength. These are his Dragon and Phoenix Double Rings."

Fu Hongxue said, "They are not."

Madame Zhuo said, "No?"

Fu Hongxue said, "These are the Rings of Great Affection. This is the unique weapon of the northwestern Iron Ring school."

Madame Zhuo said, "Why would a weapon designed for killing be named 'Great Affection'?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because once these rings settle around the opponent's weapons, they will become entangled and never let go, just like people of great love and affection!"

A strange expression suddenly appeared on his pallid face. He continued, "When affection is concentrated, one is entangled to the marrow, even if the seas run dry and stones crumble, until death shall we part. Why is it that people of great affection are also people who kill as well!"

Madame Zhuo let out a soft sigh. "When affection is concentrated, to the point where it won't stop until death, it can sometimes harm not only others, but also one's self."

Fu Hongxue said, "I'm afraid the one which is harmed is usually one's self."

Madame Zhuo slowly nodded. "Right. The one which is harmed is usually one's self."

The two of them faced each other silently. Only after a long time did madame Zhuo's beautiful smile reappear. "There isn't a weapon here which you do not recognize!"

Fu Hongxue said, "None."

Madame Zhuo lightly said, "Every single weapon here has a history behind it. Back when they caused a stir in the martial world, it wouldn't have been too hard to recognize them."

Fu Hongxue said, "There isn't anything which is truly hard in the world."

Madame Zhuo said, "Unfortunately, although some weapons have become famous long ago and killed people without number, there has never been anybody who has seen its true features. For example..."

Fu Hongxue said, "Little Li's Flying Dagger?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Right. Little Li's Flying Dagger, Never Misses Its Mark! Even Shangguan Jinhong, said to be invincible, died to that dagger. It can truly be considered the best knife in the world."

She let out another sigh, then said, "Unfortunately, up til now, no one has ever seen that dagger."

With a flash of the dagger, it enters the enemy's throat. Who, then can clearly see how long it is, or what shape it is?

Madame Zhuo sighed again. "Thus, to this very day, this is still one of the great secrets of the martial world. We have exhausted all of our efforts, but still have not been able to produce an identical flying dagger. A pearl has been lost in the great sea. Such a pity!"

Fu Hongxue said, "It seems there's another weapon missing here."

Madame Zhuo said, "The Peacock Plume?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Correct."

Madame Zhuo chuckled. "There's nothing which is perfect in the world. Fortunately, we finally have this sabre."

She suddenly plucked down the pitch-black sabre from the wall.

With a flash of sabre light, the sabre left the sheath. Not only was its length and shape exactly the same as his, it even had three notches on the edge.

Madame Zhuo smiled. "I know that this sabre isn't meant to be viewed by others. I fear even you yourself rarely look at it."

Fu Hongxue's face had turned so pale, it was almost translucent. He coldly said, "I know that some people are the same."

Madame Zhuo said, "People?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Although some people have become famous long ago and killed people without number, no one has ever seen their real face. For example..."

Madame Zhuo said, "Gongzi Yu?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Right. Gongzi Yu."

Madame Zhuo chuckled again. "You truly have never seen his face?"

Her laughter seemed very strange, very mysterious. But Fu Hongxue's reply was very simple. "I have not."

Madame Zhuo laughed. "Since you've already come here, you will see him sooner or later. Why be impatient?"

Fu Hongxue said, "How long is he going to wait before meeting with me?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Soon."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "Since he is coming soon, why the need for him training how to draw his sabre?"

That monotonous, abrupt, shrill sound was still continuing, one sound following the other. Can it be that this was the sound of drawing a sabre?



Fu Hongxue said, "There are thousands of transformations in sabreplay, but drawing the sabre is a very simple act."

Madame Zhuo said, "You have practiced that movement for very long?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Seventeen years."

Madame Zhuo said, "You practiced such a simple movement for seventeen years?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I only regret that I wasn't able to practice it for a bit longer!"

Madame Zhuo laughed again. "Since you've already trained it for seventeen years, why can't he train for a bit longer?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because even if he practices for a few more days, it won't do any good!"

Smiling, Madame Zhuo sat down. Facing him, she said, "This time, you are wrong."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh!"

Madame Zhuo said, "He isn't pulling out a sabre."

Fu Hongxue said, "He isn't?"

Madame Zhuo said, "This is pulling out a sword."

She slowly continued, "Over the past few hundred years, famous swordsmen have been as common as trees. There are ninety three new sword styles, with thousands and tens of thousands of transformations. Each has its own brilliance. Some sword styles have extremely bizarre techniques, unimaginable techniques. But there is still only one way to draw a sword."

Fu Hongxue said, "There isn't only one way. There is only one way which is the fastest!"

Madame Zhuo said, "But finding this fastest way isn't easy."

Fu Hongxue said, "The easiest way is the fastest way."

Madame Zhuo said, "Even though, the true simplicity and purity of the movement can only be returned to after thousands of transformations."

All the changes and transformations within all martial arts, could not transform into the word 'quick'.

Madame Zhuo said, "He bitterly trained for five years before he discovered this method. He has also already practiced this simple movement for seventeen years. To this very day, he is still practicing it. Every day, he practices for at least six hours."

Fu Hongxue tightly gripped his sabre. His pupils contracted.

Madame Zhuo stared at him. Her gentle eyes had turned as sharp as knives. One word at a time, she said, "Do you know why he has been bitterly training this sword-drawing technique for so long?"

Fu Hongxue said, "To deal with me?"

Madame Zhuo swallowed a breath. "You are wrong again."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Madame Zhuo said, "He doesn't necessarily want to deal with you in particular, or you as a person."

Fu Hongxue finally understood. "He wants to deal with every single martial arts expert in the world."

Madame Zhuo nodded. "Because he is determined to be the best in the world!"

Fu Hongxue sneered. "Can it be that he believes that if he defeated me, he would be the best in the world?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Up to this point in time, he has always believed this."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then he is wrong as well."

Madame Zhuo said, "He isn't wrong."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "The martial world is filled with crouching tigers and hidden dragons, and the dusty world is filled with many marvelous people. Who knows how many people there are whose skills martial arts are far better than mine..."

Madame Zhuo interjected, "But up to this point in time, there still has not been anyone who can defeat you."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.

Madame Zhuo said, "I, too, can tell that defeating you isn't an easy task. You are definitely the most extraordinary person who has come here."

Fu Hongxue couldn't help but ask, "Many people have come here before?"

Madame Zhuo avoided this question, instead saying, "Not only is the collection of weapons on the wall very complete, they are all masterpieces. Anyone who practices martial arts would find it hard to resist giving them a few glances. Only you can be totally unmoved."

Sighing, she said, "The strangest thing of all is, you didn't even glance once at the painting."

Fu Hongxue said, "Why must I look at it?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Give it a glance, and you will understand."

Suddenly, a voice could be heard. "Since he is going to see it sooner or later, why the rush?"

A calm, leisurely voice, clearly coming from a person of good breeding, refined and urbane.

Originally, being too polite was a sign of being unfriendly and cold. But this voice carried a strange warmth, such warmth that it almost approached being brutal.

If there was a power in the world which was capable of exterminating everything, without question it must have been birthed from this warmth.

And only a type of person such as Gongzi Yu could have such terrifying warmth. He clearly thirsted to meet Fu Hongxue as well. He knew that the time when they met would be a time for extermination. At least one of them would be exterminated.

Now, he was already standing behind Fu Hongxue. Within his hands, he held a long sword which could be pierced through Fu Hongxue's vital points at any time.

What type of person was he? Was it a sword that he held in his hands?



## Chapter 22 – Gongzi Yu

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Fu Hongxue did not turn around. He did not move.

He couldn't move. He already felt a sort of all-conquering, all-pervasive killing aura. If he moved, regardless of the movement, he might give the opponent an opening. Even a single twitch of a muscle might be a fatal mistake. Although he knew that a person like Gongzi Yu was definitely not the type of person to attack from behind, he couldn't not take precaution.

Gongzi Yu suddenly laughed. His laughter was graceful and courteous. "You truly are worthy of being called an incomparable, elite master."

Fu Hongxue was still silent.

But Madame Zhuo blinked her eyes a few times. "He didn't even move, but you can tell he is a master?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Precisely because he did not move, he is an incomparable, elite master."

Madame Zhuo said, "Can it be that not moving is harder than moving?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Much harder."

Madame Zhuo said, "I don't understand."

Gongzi Yu said, "You should understand. If you were Fu Hongxue, and knew that I had suddenly arrived at your back, what would you do?"

Madame Zhuo said, "I would definitely be very surprised!"

Gongzi Yu said, "When surprised, you can't help but put up your guard. You can't help but move."

Madame Zhuo said, "Right!"

Gongzi Yu said, "But so long as you moved, you would die!"

Madame Zhuo said, "Why?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Because you simply do not know from where I might attack. Thus, no matter how you move, you will have made a fatal mistake."

Madame Zhuo said, "If an opponent like you suddenly appeared behind somebody, no matter who they are, they would be tense. Even if they didn't move, the muscles on their back would tighten."

Gongzi Yu said, "But he did not. Although I have been standing behind him for very long, not a single part of his body has changed!"

Madame Zhuo finally let out a sigh. "Now I finally understand. Not moving truly is much harder than moving."

If you knew a man like Gongzi Yu was standing behind you, but could keep all the muscles in your body loose and slack, then you must be a man with nerves colder than ice.

Madame Zhuo suddenly asked again, "Can it be that if he doesn't move, you won't have an opportunity to attack?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Not moving is moving. The final destination of all movements is not moving."

Madame Zhuo said, "If you have too many openings, you actually have no openings, because your entire body will have become open. Open and clear, as empty as a vast mist. So you actually won't know where to make your move?"

Gongzi Yu chuckled. "I knew you would understand this reasoning."

Madame Zhuo said, "I also know that you definitely won't attack. If you wanted to kill him from behind, you had many better opportunities than this one."

Smiling, she said, "Because your goal isn't to kill him. It's to beat him."

Gongzi Yu suddenly let out a sigh. "Killing him is easy. Beating him is really very difficult."

He finally walked out from behind Fu Hongxue. His steps were serene and stable. Just at this moment, Fu Hongxue suddenly felt as though he were about to collapse. Cold sweat soaked his clothes.

He definitely could not let Gongzi Yu see this. He suddenly said, "Why must you give up the easy path and take the hard one?"

Gongzi Yu said in a heavy voice, "Because you are Fu Hongxue, and I am Gongzi Yu."

Gongzi Yu was finally facing Fu Hongxue now. But Fu Hongxue still could not see his true appearance.

From the back, his elegant bearing seemed perfect and unassailable. However, on his face he wore a ferocious, hideous bronze mask!

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "I didn't imagine that Gongzi Yu doesn't dare to use his own face to meet people."

Madame Zhuo said, "You are wrong."

Fu Hongxue sneered.

Madame Zhuo said, "What you are seeing right now is Gongzi Yu's true face."

Fu Hongxue said, "What I am seeing right now is but a mask."

Madame Zhuo said, "Isn't there a mask on my face right now? Have you always had this cold, frozen, bloodless pale look to your face? And yet, isn't this still your true face?"

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth again.

Madame Zhuo said, "Actually, you should understand that how he looks isn't important, so long as you know that he is Gongzi Yu. This is the important point."

This was the truth. Not even Fu Hongxue could deny it, because he couldn't help but ask himself: "Am I currently showing my true features right now? What do my true features look like?"

Gongzi Yu lightly said, "I don't necessarily want to see your true features. I just want to know that you are Fu Hongxue. That's enough."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. Only after a long time, did he say in a deep voice, "Now, you already know that I am Fu Hongxue. I also already know that you are Gongzi Yu."

Gongzi Yu said, "Therefore, there is something I wish to resolve."

Fu Hongxue said, "What?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Between the two of us, only one of us can stay alive."

His voice was still callous but polite. He was clearly very confident in himself. "Whoever is stronger is whoever shall survive."

Fu Hongxue said, "There seems to be only one way to resolve this issue."

Gongzi Yu said, "Correct. There's only one way. Since ancient times, there's only been one way."

He stared at the sabre in Fu Hongxue's hand. "So I must personally defeat you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Otherwise, you'd rather die?"

An unspeakable look of sorrow was suddenly revealed in Gongzi Yu's eyes. "Otherwise, I must die."

Fu Hongxue said, "I don't understand."

Gongzi Yu said, "You should understand. I don't want others to kill you, in order to prove that I am stronger than you. I am definitely going to be the strongest in the world. Otherwise, I would rather die."



His voice was suddenly filled with cynicism. "The martial world is like an independent country of its own. Only one ruler may be allowed to exist at any one time. If it isn't me, it'd be you!"

Fu Hongxue said, "This time, I'm afraid you're wrong!"

Gongzi Yu said, "I'm not wrong. There are many things which indicate that aside from me, you are the person with the highest level of martial arts in the martial world!"

He suddenly turned around, facing the painting on the wall. He slowly continued, "You were able to survive long enough to get here. That wasn't an easy task. It wasn't due to luck."

Madame Zhuo let out a light sigh. "It definitely wasn't."

There were many people on the painting, almost lifelike in their perfection. The painting revealed a series of stories. There was a common person in every story. That person was Fu Hongxue. Facing the painting, the first thing he saw was himself.

Gloomy weather, a little town on the borderlands. There were two people locked in a vicious battle in the long street. One wore clothes as white as snow, but in his hand he wielded a scarlet red sword. The other wielded a pitch-black sabre.

Gongzi Yu said, "You should remember this. This is the Phoenix Market."

Fu Hongxue naturally remembered. At that time, the Phoenix Market hadn't become a dead settlement. That was also the first time he had met Yan Nanfei.

Gongzi Yu said, "In this battle, you defeated Yan Nanfei."

In the second segment of the painting, the Phoenix Market had already become a ghost town. In the middle of the mist, two people knelt before Fu Hongxue.

Gongzi Yu said, "In this battle, you defeated the Twin Killers of the Five Elements."

And then it was the vipers in the horse saddle, Ghostly Granny's poisonous cakes, and the poisoned wine in the bright moon's building.

In the middle of the desolate Ni Family Garden, a young barefoot man was slowly falling down before his sabre.

Gongzi Yu said, "Du Lei originally was an expert of a rarely seen calibre in the martial world. His sabre was forged through bitterness and misery. Although it was a bit arrogant and artificial, I really did not imagine that you would kill him in one chop!"

Fu Hongxue said, "A sabre art designed to kill only has one chop!"

Gongzi Yu sighed. "Not to think of it, and yet when you think of it, the gods know. Striking later, but arriving first. Not changing despite thousands of transformations in front of you. One sabre chop really is enough!"

Not only did this single sabre chop shatter all of the various transformations of all sabre arts, it also overcame the boundaries of form and speed.

Madame Zhuo said, "What I really could not imagine was that you were actually able to escape from that secret room in the Peacock Manor!"

The Peacock Manor had turned into a heap of rubble, and Zhuo Yuzhen appeared on the painting. The Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch angrily chopped the horse in half, chef Hao chopped flesh in front of the cart, Mingyue Xin and Zhuo Yuzhen being sent into the secret room in the Peacock Manor, Gongsun Tu appearing, Zhuo Yuzhen giving birth in the secret room...

By this time, Fu Hongxue's hand had already turned ice cold.

Madame Zhuo said, "She was a string. Originally, we wanted to use her to bind your hands. If your heart always pined after her and her two children, your hands will effectively have been fastened."

A person whose hands had been fastened, naturally was not worth Gongzi Yu personally dealing with.

Madame Zhuo sighed again. "But we truly did not imagine that even in that situation, you were capable of killing the Demon Decapitating Sabre of Heaven's Monarch!"

Fu Hongxue's hands tightened. "At that time, you were already preparing to allow her to reveal her true identity. Why did you have her kill Du Shiqi?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Because we needed her to do one last thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "You wanted her to use those two children to force me to hand over the Sorrowful Book of Yin and Yang and of Heaven and Hell Mingling?"

Madame Zhuo nodded. "Only then did we believe that the Sorrowful Book of Yin and Yang did not fall into your hands, because we knew that for those two children, you would be willing to give up everything."

She sighed again, then said, "A pity that you actually were able to master the Great Acupoint Changing Technique. You actually didn't die in her hands. The even greater pity is that you couldn't steel your heart enough to kill her!"

The girl wearing the jasmine flowers appeared on the painting. She was feeding chicken soup to Fu Hongxue. The old lady next door was killing a chicken. Xiao Ting, wearing her jasmine flowers, was buying alcohol in the small store at the other side of the street. The obese store owner was staring at her chest, an obscene smile on his face. But he lay drunken in that small room, as though he had slowly become used to that lowly way of living.

Madame Zhuo said, "At that time, we originally thought that you were finished. Even if you could still kill, you would be nothing more than an insane executioner. You were already not worth Gongzi Yu personally dealing with you."

The only person Gongzi Yu would personally deal with was the strongest person in the martial world.

Madame Zhuo said, "Even if you were already no longer the strongest person in the martial world, we wouldn't have been happy if you died in a sewer. So at that time, we were planning to find someone else to kill you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, there aren't many people who can kill me."

Madame Zhuo said, "We at least have one person who can."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Yourself."

Fu Hongxue suddenly once again thought of that bitter, cold, despairing melody. It was more than enough to make a person totally lose all his will to live. No one could have imagined that when he reached that point, he would still have the courage to keep living. Perhaps it was because he had that sort of courage, that he was able to live until today. If even he himself could defeat himself, why would Gongzi Yu need to personally deal with him?

Gongzi Yu said, "Thus, you should now finally understand that you were able to live until today, not because of luck."

Fu Hongxue asked again. "Have you done this solely because you must prove you are stronger than me?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Right?"

Once more, that unspeakable sorrow and cynicism was in his eyes. "Because all of this can only be enjoyed by the strongest person. If you can defeat me, all of this is yours."

Fu Hongxue said, "All of this?"

Madame Zhuo said, "What all of this refers to is everything. It not only includes all of his riches, his honor, and his glory, it also includes me."

She laughed. Her laughter was very gentle, very warm, very sweet. "So long as you can beat him, even I am yours."

Open the door and outside you would see a long hallway, so long that it seemed one could never reach the end. Gongzi Yu had already opened the door, walked out, then turned around.

"Please, come with me."

Madame Zhuo didn't follow Fu Hongxue out. Now, they had reached the end of this hallway.

At the end of the hallways was another flower-carved wooden door. It was exquisite but solemn. Within was a spacious grand hall. There was an enormous stone platform, with four enormous torches lit in each of the four corners.

Gongzi Yu slowly went onto the platform. Standing in the middle of the platform, he said, "This is where we shall fight."

Fu Hongxue said, "Excellent."

A perfectly smooth stone platform. Brilliant torchlight. No matter where you stood, no matter where you faced, everything was the same. There wasn't even a hint of wind in the room. The preparations you made while striking, or the speed of your strike, definitely wouldn't be interfered with by any outside factors.

Gongzi Yu clearly didn't want to gain any unfair advantages from the weather or the terrain. For a person to do this much was already a very rare thing.

There were three large and comfortable chairs on each of the two sides of the stone platform. Every chair was precisely seven feet away from the stone platform.

Gongzi Yu said, "When we fight, only six people can be allowed to watch. They will also be the witnesses to our duel. You may choose any three people you please."

Fu Hongxue said, "No need."

Gongzi Yu said, "When experts fight, victory and defeat are often determined in a very brief period of time. With your own friends watching on the side, you would feel a bit more at ease. Why would you give up this right?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I have no friends."

Gongzi Yu stared at him, then said, "It's best if you keep this right. If the people whom I bring make you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to reject them."

Fu Hongxue said, "Very good."

Gongzi Yu said, "You've been exhausted, day after day. You can't help but not be as vigorous, as alert as you normally would be. It's better if you rest here for some time. Thus, I will allow you to choose the day of our battle as well!"

Fu Hongxue hesitated, then said, "How about tomorrow, at this time?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Very good."

Fu Hongxue said, "Then tomorrow, I will come again."

Gongzi Yu said, "No need to leave. I have already prepared a room and a change of clothes for you here. You can rest in peace. There will definitely be no one who will come to disturb you. If you have any needs, we can carry them out for you."

Fu Hongxue said, "It seems this really will be a very fair duel."

Gongzi Yu said, "It definitely will be."

Fu Hongxue said, "I imagine you have already prepared my coffin as well."

Gongzi Yu actually did not deny it. "It's an excellent coffin made of nanmu wood. I had it specially imported here from Liuzhou. If you want to take a look at it, I can take you there."

Fu Hongxue said, "Have you seen it?"

Gongzi Yu said, "I've seen it."

Fu Hongxue said, "You are satisfied with it?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Very satisfied."

Fu Hongxue dully said, "Then that'll be all."

Gongzi Yu's reaction was even more flat. "Right now, perhaps the only thing you wish to see is your bed."

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Gaudy, beautiful velvet curtains blocked the rays of the sun. The room as dark as dusk.

From outside, the dull, monotonous sound of a sword being drawn could once more be heard. Fu Hongxue was totally awake and clear-minded.

Earlier, he had actually fallen asleep. He hadn't been woken up by the sound of the sword. He suddenly woke up because someone had appeared in the room. A tall and slender human shadow, leaning against the window, back towards him. Beneath her soft silk gown, one could vaguely see her slender waist and limbs, and her perfectly straight legs.

She knew that Fu Hongxue had woken up, but did not turn around. Instead, she lightly let out a sigh, then slowly said, "Another day has passed. Day after day, year after year. When will this sort of life end?"

A noble, graceful voice. A gentle, exquisite posture. And yet, it carried an indescribable sense of weariness.

Fu Hongxue did not react.

Madame Zhuo slowly continued, "Perhaps you feel that I shouldn't have come at all. After all, I am still his wife, but I truly am too tired of this life, and therefore..."

Fu Hongxue said, "Therefore, you hope that I can defeat him?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Right. I do hope you can defeat him. After all these years, you are the only person who has a chance to defeat him. Only after you defeat him can my life change."

Fu Hongxue said, "The victor will get everything?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Absolutely everything."

Fu Hongxue said, "Even his wife is included?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue suddenly laughed coldly. "Since you aren't a good wife, there's no need for him to risk it."

Madame Zhuo said, "But he still wishes to prove he is stronger than you."

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "Prove it to who? Can it be that there is another master here who controls his life? Can it be that he is doing this because he simply does not have any room to choose otherwise?"

Madame Zhuo suddenly turned her head and fixed him with her stare. Her beautiful eyes were filled with shock. After a long time, she finally sighed, then said, "Why would you think these sorts of thoughts?"

Fu Hongxue said, "If you were me, what would you think?"

Madame Zhuo said, "At the very least, I wouldn't think crazy thoughts like you are doing right now. I would focus all of my thoughts on how to defeat him."

She slowly walked over, her limbs and her waist soft, her eyes like a pool of water. "Although I cannot be considered a good wife, I am still a very good woman. You should be able to see this."

Fu Hongxue said, "I can't."

Madame Zhuo lightly let out a sigh. "Why don't you take a look now."

After she finished these words, the soft silk clothes on her body fell down.

Fu Hongxue's breath stopped. He couldn't help but admit that this was the most beautiful, flawless body he had ever seen in his life. A tall, noble woman, suddenly baring everything in front of you. This sort of temptation is all the more difficult for people to resist.

She quietly stood at the head of the bed, staring at him. "As long as you can win this battle, everything will be yours. But right now, it isn't yet."



Fu Hongxue's pallid face had already flushed red. He knew the changes which were going on in his body. He also knew that she must have noticed as well.

A beautiful dusk. The room was so quiet, yet filled with the graceful aroma which her body emitted.

He was a man, after all.

But she suddenly lifted up her clothes, gliding out like a swallow. As she walked out the door, she suddenly turned and laughed, "Right now, I'm not yours yet. But if you need it, I can find someone else to accompany you."

Fu Hongxue tightened his fist. He suddenly asked, "Is Zhuo Yuzhen here?"

Madame Zhuo nodded.

Fu Hongxue said, "Bring her here. Immediately."

Shocked, Madame Zhuo stared at him. It seemed as though even in her wildest dreams, she had never imagined he would make this request.

Fu Hongxue coldly said, "You just said, if there is anything I need, you can provide it for me."

Madame Zhuo laughed again. It seemed as though her laughter was filled with an indescribable sort of cunning. "Why do you insist on her? Why don't you choose Mingyue Xin?"

Fu Hongxue's body suddenly went stiff.

Madame Zhuo said leisurely, "You didn't imagine that she would still be alive?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I..."

Madame Zhuo said, "She's here. Do you want me to bring her here?"

Her face suddenly sunk. She coldly said, "I know you don't want me to. You want Zhuo Yuzhen. You've always liked despicable, diabolical girls like her."

With a slamming sound, the door closed heavily. This time, when she left, she didn't look back.

Why did she suddenly turn so impulsive and angry? Just because Fu Hongxue wanted Zhuo Yuzhen?

A beautiful, cunning, yet level-headed woman, usually wouldn't become angry over something like this.

Fu Hongxue was still quietly lying on his bed. That shrill, abrupt sound was still going on nonstop. The other was paying such a high price for this battle. If he were to become annoyed over a woman, wouldn't that be silly?

But he couldn't help but think of Mingyue Xin. If she really still had not died, and had fallen into the hands of these people, she might have met with a fate more miserable than death.

Only when he thought of this did he suddenly realize that it had been a long, long time since he had thought of her.

A person would always try to avoid thinking about things which made him feel guilty.

Suddenly, the night was deep and dark. The room was totally black. From outside, there was a sound of knocking.

"Who is it?"

"It is miss Zhuo, miss Zhuo Yuzhen."

Two serving girls helped Zhuo Yuzhen walk in.

She had made herself up beautifully. Her beautiful black hair was adorned with pearl ornaments, and a beautiful scarlet red cloak covered her, dragging on the ground. She looked almost like the legendary beauty who was given away for a marriage treaty, Wang Zhaojun.

Right now, she obviously did not need to continue the pretense of being so pitiable. She coldly stared at Fu Hongxue. Her face was expressionless.

The serving girls put down the lantern. They giggled, then quietly crept away.

Zhuo Yuzhen suddenly coldly said, "Did you ask me to come?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "To get revenge on me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I asked you to come, originally because I had a few questions I wanted to talk to you about."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "And now?"

Fu Hongxue said, "And now, I don't want to ask anymore. So you can go."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You don't want to get revenge?"

Fu Hongxue said, "No."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "You don't want me to go to your bed either?"

Fu Hongxue closed his mouth. He didn't actually blame her. For her to say these words wasn't very surprising either. For women like her, when they were no longer capable of harming others with their actions, they would use poisonous words to harm instead. She hurt others, perhaps only to protect herself.

He didn't blame her, but he suddenly felt very tired. He only hoped that she would leave quickly, and that they would never meet again. He suddenly realized that nothing else was important. Only tomorrow's battle was important. He needed to defeat the man who was still practicing drawing his sword at this very moment. Only after defeating this person could he solve all of the mysteries, could he see Mingyue Xin again.

But Zhuo Yuzhen stubbornly stood there, staring at him. Her eyes were filled with grief and hatred. She suddenly said, "Since you don't care about me at all, why did you insist on me coming?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Even if I shouldn't have asked you to come, you can still leave now, just the same."

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "It's not the same anymore."

Fu Hongxue said, "How is it not the same?"

Zhuo Yuzhen said, "It's not the same, it's not the same..."

It seemed as though she hadn't even heard Fu Hongxue's question. From her lips, that phrase simply continued without stopping. Who knows how many times she said it? Suddenly, her tears began to flow down her cheeks. Her body fell down as well. The scarlet red cape fluttered open, revealing a scarlet, blood-like color.

It was real blood. Fresh blood had already dyed her bare torso scarlet. On her entire body, there wasn't a single part of her body that was whole.

Fu Hongxue jumped up, but his heart had already sunk down.

Zhuo Yuzhen ground her teeth. "By now, you should understand why it's not the same anymore..."

Fu Hongxue said, "Because I asked you to come, she tortured you like this?"

Zhuo Yuzhen chuckled. "Actually, you should have realized long ago that although she didn't want you to touch her, she didn't want you to touch any other women, because..."

Her laughter was even more tragic than crying. She wanted to continue to speak, but could no longer say another word.

Fu Hongxue was still asking. "Why? Why?"

Zhuo Yuzhen chuckled again. Her eyes lifted up. A strong medicinal smell wafted up from her cloak. Her death wasn't very painful, because her entire body had already been numbed by madame Zhuo's medicine.

Supposedly, in far away Africa, in the fertile muds of the Nile river, there is a beautiful yet strange flower called the 'opium' poppy. Not only could it numb a person's body, it could also numb a person's soul.

Some women were just like that flower. The blood flowing within her noble, graceful body, was actually more venomous than the flowers of opium poppies.

Why did she do this? Just because she didn't want Fu Hongxue to touch another woman?

She had only known Fu Hongxue for less than half a day. Why would she be so wildly jealous of him?

How could there be jealousy without love? How could there be love between people who had only known each other for half a day?

Fu Hongxue slowly stood up. He slowly walked over, then gently opened the door. If the door had been bolted from the outside, if the door had been made of iron, he wouldn't have been surprised. He was already mentally prepared. No matter what happened, no matter what the situation, he was prepared to endure it.

Unexpectedly, with a light push, the door swung open. There was nobody outside the door, and there was nobody in the long hallway. There was only that monotonous, abrupt sound of a sword being drawn, still continuing without pause.

He headed towards the direction of this sound. The hallway was long but winding. There was a long distance between each room. After an unknown number of twists and turns, he finally saw a door. Inside the door, it was quiet. There was no one inside. There also was not the sound of a sword being drawn.

He still pushed the door open and went inside. He had once again arrived at the room he had just left. Zhuo Yuzhen, who had been in a pool of blood, had disappeared.

The room was still peaceful. Although a person was missing from it, a full table of dishes had been added to it.

It was time to eat dinner. Six exquisite dishes, all still warm, and a bamboo plate with small steamed buns on it. A pot of polished white rice, and a vat of not-yet-opened wine.

Right now, he really needed to drink a little wine, but he left again.

The hallway was the same, and as quiet as before. But his walking style had already changed. Originally, he walked very slowly. Now, he walked a bit faster. Originally, he was walking to the right; this time, he walked to the left.

After another unknown number of twists and turns, he once again saw a door. The room inside was still quiet. The carvings on the door were exactly the same as well. Only, when he left earlier, he hadn't closed the door, while this door was shut.

He pushed the door open and walked in. He had already warned himself three times to be steady and keep calm. But once he entered the room, he couldn't help but feel very unwell, because he once again saw that table of dishes. He once again had entered the room he had just left. The dishes were still warm. They seemed even warmer than they were earlier.

But beneath the vat of wine, there was a short note. The writing was very delicate. Clearly, it was a woman's handwriting!

"The bright moon never had a heart. Why search for the moon?  
A little drink can help you sleep soundly. Why don't you drink alone?"

Fu Hongxue sat down. He had to force himself to sit down, because he had discovered that regardless of how he walked, the result was the same. He would still come back here, would still see that table filled with dishes which seemed to never grow cold.

He also wanted to force himself to eat a bit, but as soon as he lifted up his chopsticks, he found that something was amiss. Of the six dishes earlier, one dish had been squirrel and yellow croaker, while another was sweet and sour spareribs. Although he had only taken one look, he remembered it very clearly. He was always very sensitive to the sour taste of vinegar as well, but now, all six of the dishes were vegetarian. The full pot of rice had turned into a full pot of porridge.

He also finally realized that this room wasn't the room he had just left. Not only was every room here identical, the utensils and the furniture were identical as well. Even he couldn't tell if the room he originally was in was this one, or the previous one?

The bedding on the bed was in a mess. Clearly, someone had slept here. Was the person who had been sleeping on this bed earlier him, or someone else? If it wasn't him, who was it?

What type of people lived in this mysterious, strange place?



## Chapter 23 – Mysterious Old Man

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There was a small room behind the bedroom. The sound of water could be heard coming from it.

He couldn't help but walk over. The door was open. He took only one look, before feeling all the warm blood in his body rush to his head.

The small room was actually a beautifully decorated and furnished bathing room. Steam rose from the hot water, and there were carved jade banisters in all directions. There was a large white robe on top of the banister.

A person stood in the middle of the water, back to him, snow-white skin as sleek and glossy as silk. Sleek waist and limbs, plentiful and round buttocks, tall and slender legs. She looked as though she had been carved from white jade.

Fu Hongxue couldn't see her face. All he could see was that all of the hair on her head had been shaved off cleanly, leaving behind only the incense scars on her head.

This beautiful, bathing woman was actually a nun.

It wasn't as though Fu Hongxue hadn't seen a woman before. He had also seen naked women before. But a naked nun was something way different.

Although the beauty of this nun's backside made his eyes dizzy and his heart tremble, he definitely did not dare to take another look.

He immediately rushed out. After a long time, his heartrate finally returned to normal.

He suddenly had a strange thought. "Can this nun be Mingyue Xin?"



This wasn't impossible. After experiencing such traumatic events, Mingyue Xin very well could have left the secular world and become a nun. But he no longer had the courage to go back in and verify it.

Just at this moment, he noticed another door. It had the same carvings, and it also seemed unlocked. He was no longer able to verify whatsoever whether or not this room was the same room he had originally stayed in.

Perhaps Mingyue Xin was inside this room. Or perhaps madame Zhuo was inside the room, her heart as venomous as a pit of vipers.

Since he had already come here, he was definitely going to take a look. He first knocked on the door. No response. He lightly pushed the door open. There really was a table full of dishes inside. This was the time to eat dinner, after all. Any type of person would be eating.

A crisp, sweet taste wafted out from the door. Of the six dishes on the table, there really was one dish with squirrel and yellow croaker, and one dish with sweet and sour spareribs.

After spinning around in innumerable circles, he had once more arrived in his own room. Unexpectedly, he actually felt relieved. Just as he was about to push the door open and go in, he suddenly heard a thudding sound as the door closed inwards.

A cold female voice said from within, "Who is sneaking around outside? Leave now!"

Fu Hongxue's heart leapt.

He could tell whose voice this was. It was Mingyue Xin's voice. He couldn't resist saying, "Mingyue Xin, is that you?"

After a long time, he once more reported his own name. He thought that Mingyue Xin would definitely open the door.

Who would have known that the female voice would coldly say, "I don't know you. Leave now."

Was she forced to act this way, due to a perilous condition? Was someone guarding her, causing her to not dare to meet with him?

Fu Hongxue suddenly rammed the door hard. A carved wooden door is always weaker than a plain one. As soon as he collided with it, it opened.

He walked in. A person was standing in front of the bed, staring at him coldly. But it wasn't Mingyue Xin. It was madame Zhuo.

It seemed as though she too had just come from the bathing chamber. Her naked body had already been covered with a soft silk robe, but it made her body seem all the more alluring. Fu Hongxue was stunned.

Madame Zhuo said icily, "You shouldn't have barged in like this. You should know that right now, I am someone else's wife."

Her voice really did have some vague similarities with that of Mingyue Xin's. Fu Hongxue only stared at her, as though he were trying to discern some secret from her face.

Madame Zhuo said, "I've already sent Zhuo Yuzhen to you. Why did you come here to find me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because you are the person I am looking for. You are Mingyue Xin."

There was no sound in the room, nor was there any expression on madame Zhuo's face. It was as though she was wearing a mask.

Perhaps this was her true face. Or perhaps this, too, was not. But this was already unimportant, because Fu Hongxue now already understood that how she looked was unimportant. So long as he knew that she was Mingyue Xin, the important point had been grasped.

She stood there without moving for an unknown period of time. She finally let out a long sigh. "You are wrong."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

Madame Zhuo dully said, "There's no such person as Mingyue Xin in the world. The bright moon never had a heart to begin with." [Going back to the pun of 'Mingyue Xin' literally meaning 'Bright moon's heart'. These words were also spoken by Fu Hongxue long ago, when he first met Mingyue Xin.]

Fu Hongxue acknowledged that.

A bright moon with a heart was like a rose without thorns. It only appeared in legends and fairy tales.

Madame Zhuo said, "Perhaps you once saw Mingyue Xin in a different place, but that person is just like your old lover, Cui Nong. She no longer exists."

A bygone love which is hard to forget, a wound which is eternal. Perhaps it was precisely because she knew that he would never dare to face that face that she chose that face to disguise herself as, so that he might never see through her disguise.

During times of sunlight, she would even put on a smiling, laughing mask. And then she suddenly disappeared. Mingyue Xin had disappeared forever. It was as though she had never existed.

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, you made one mistake. You should not have killed Zhuo Yuzhen."

How could there be jealousy without love? How could there be love between people who had only known each other for half a day?

A strange red color had already begun to suffuse Fu Hongxue's face. "You killed her, only because you hate me."

That noble, graceful expression on her face had disappeared as well. Her eyes were suddenly filled with hatred.

How could there be hatred without love?

"Mingyue Xin died for you, but you never even mentioned her; Zhuo Yuzhen harmed you like that, and yet you always remembered her."

She didn't actually say these words. She didn't need to say these words.

She suddenly loudly said, "Right, I hate you, so I hope you will die."

Turning around, she entered the small room behind her. A splashing sound could be heard, as though someone leapt into the bath. But by the time Fu

Hongxue entered to find her, the bathing pool was empty, and there was no one in the room.

The abrupt, monotonous sword-drawing sound continued. It seemed to be just outside the window, but when he pushed apart the drapes and pulled the window up, there was only a stone wall outside with only a few air holes. Through these air holes, only darkness could be seen, without any clue as to what type of place it was.

How did she leave? That small room definitely had a secret passage, but Fu Hongxue no longer cared to search for it. He had already found the person he was looking for, and he also knew why she killed Zhuo Yuzhen.

Now, the only thing he could do was wait. Wait for the battle tomorrow. Although waiting here was the same as waiting anywhere else, he wasn't willing to wait here. Pushing the door open, he left. The abrupt, monotonous sword-drawing sound seemed even closer.

He knew that he definitely would not be able to rest peacefully, and that madame Zhuo definitely wouldn't let him off. She definitely would think of all sorts of methods to harass him, to make him feel anxious and tense, to destabilize his mind. Even though he hadn't mistreated her, even though she had gone missing of her own accord, and although they hadn't come to any sort of secret accord or relationship in the past...she would never think of these things.

When a woman decides to hate a man, she could find a couple hundred excuses at any time. Although there were many inexplicable things in this situation, he was no longer willing to think about them. So long as he could defeat Gongzi Yu, every single mystery would immediately be revealed. Why should he overthink things now?

And if he were to die to Gongzi Yu, these matters would become even less worth thinking about. Death was the best answer to any sort of question!

At this time, he found yet another door. The sword-drawing sound came from this room.

This time, he was certain. The sword-drawing sound definitely was coming from this room.

He stretched his hand out to push the door open. As soon as his finger touched the door, he suddenly discovered that this door was cast from iron.

The room was bolted from inside. He couldn't push it open, nor could he ram it open. Knocking had even less of a response. Just as he was about to give up, he suddenly noticed that the copper rings above the door were especially bright. Clearly, a person's hand had often stroked them.

A copper ring wasn't like a woman's breast, nor was it a toy. If there was no particular reason for it, nobody would often play with a copper ring.

He immediately found the reason. He spun the copper rings around, testing tens of times, before finding the correct solution.

The iron door immediately opened.

The sword-drawing sound also immediately stopped!

When he entered the room, he didn't see the sword-drawer. But he saw a gigantic treasury, the likes of which he had never seen before.

Pearls, green jade, crystals, catseyes, and all sorts of other gems which he did not know the name for were piled in a giant heap.

This was a room that was far larger than anyone could imagine. These priceless pearls and gemstones evidently did not seem to be very precious in the eyes of the host. There wasn't even a chest in this room. The heaps of gems were like heaps of shining garbage, scattered messily all about.

There was a metal cabinet in one corner of the room. On top of it, there was a massive iron lock. What was hidden inside? Can it be that it was even more precious than all of these treasures?

In order to open the metal cabinet, the massive iron lock must first be opened. In order to open the lock, one must have the key.

But there was a type of person who did not need a key to open a lock. Although there weren't too few people of this sort in the world, there weren't too many either. In addition, this lock was exquisitely made. The artisan who made this lock once boasted that there couldn't be more than three people in the world who could open this lock without the key, because

he knew the three most godlike thieves in the world. But what he didn't know was that there was a fourth person in the world.

Fu Hongxue was the fourth.

He picked the lock open very quickly. Within the cabinet, there was only a sword and an old ledger.

A scarlet sword, as crimson as fresh blood.

Fu Hongxue's pupils contracted. Naturally, he recognized that this was Yan Nanfei's 'Rose Sword'.

'If the sword is here, the man is here! If the sword is broken, the man perishes!' His sword was here. Where was he?

The ledger was very old and very ratty. Clearly, someone often leafed through it. Why would such an old, ratty ledger be treasured so much?

He casually flipped it open, and then immediately found the solution. On top of this page, the following words were written:

*Wang Feng, leader of the Magnificent Escort Agency, made a mistake in offering a poor tribute on February 18th. The young master did not like it.*

*On February 19th, Wang Feng was trampled to death.*

*Nangong Ao, second son of the aristocratic Nangong family, was slow to pay his respects when met on February 19th. His words were not courteous.*

*On the night of February 19th, Nangong Ao died by violence after drinking.*

*Peng Gui, heir to the 'Five Tigers Shattering the Gate' sabre technique, did not do his job properly on February 21st. He revealed classified information.*

*On February 22nd, Peng Gui committed suicide.*

Just after seeing these few lines, Fu Hongxue's hands were already cold.

To Gongzi Yu, no matter what mistake you made, the result would be the same.

Death! Only death can truly solve the issue at the root.

Gongzi Yu definitely wouldn't give anyone the chance to make a second mistake. Even less would he allow anyone to retaliate. This ledger symbolized his power, his power over people's life and death, an absolute, tyrannical power. This sort of power naturally was more intoxicating than that of pearls or wealth!

So long as you can win the battle, everything will be yours, including all the wealth, the glory, and the power!

Since time immemorial, heroes and valiant men had endured through hundreds of battles, piled up bones into mountains, caused blood to flow like a river, all for what?

Who could resist this sort of lure?

Fu Hongxue let out a long sigh. Lifting his head up, he suddenly saw a pair of eyes staring out at him from within the metal cabinet.

Originally, there was only a sword and a ledger in the cabinet. But now, a pair of eyes, sharper than knife edges, had appeared within it.

The four square-foot iron cabinet suddenly became both dark and mysterious. So dark, the bottom couldn't be seen. That pair of eyes remained in the darkness, staring at him.

Fu Hongxue unconsciously took two steps back. His palm was already cold with sweat. He naturally knew that there was a door on the other side of the cabinet, and that there was a man outside the door.

Now, the door on that side was open as well. The man suddenly appeared.

But for such a pair of eyes to suddenly appear in the darkness, he still couldn't help but be startled. And then, he immediately saw this person's face. A face filled with wrinkles and white hair. It was an old man who had experienced the hardships of life. However, his eyes were still young and filled with a boundless intelligence and power.

The old man smiled. "I know you have night vision. You certainly have already seen that I am an old man."

Fu Hongxue nodded.

The old man said, "This is the first time you have seen me. It is also the first time I have seen you with my own eyes. I hope this isn't the last time."

Fu Hongxue said, "You, too, hope that I will defeat Gongzi Yu?"

The old man said, "I at least don't wish to see you die."

Fu Hongxue said, "What benefit does my being alive bring you?"

The old man said, "No benefit. I only hope that this battle can be truly fair."

Fu Hongxue said, "Oh?"

The old man said, "Only if the truly superior person wins, can this match been considered truly fair."

His smile disappeared. His decrepit old face immediately became solemn and impressive. Only a person who is used to controlling power can have such a firm, tenacious expression.

He slowly continued, "The strongest will have everything. This has always been an unalterable, right and proper principle. Only the truly strongest man can be worthy of having everything."

Fu Hongxue stared at his transformation in astonishment. He couldn't help but ask, "Do you think I am stronger than him?"

The old man said, "At least, you are the only person who has a chance to defeat him. But right now, you are too tense, too tired."

Fu Hongxue admitted to it. This entire time, he had been trying to keep himself calm and collected, but he had failed.

The old man said, "There is only sixteen hours from now to the time of your battle. If you cannot totally relax yourself, at this time tomorrow, your corpse will surely be ice cold."



He did not let Fu Hongxue speak. He continued, "Walk out of this room and take three turns to the right. In the room to the left, there will be a woman waiting for you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Who?"

The old man said, "You don't need to ask who she is. Nor do you need to ask why she is waiting for you!"

His voice had also turned sharp and grim!

"A man like you should always consider all the women in the world to be nothing more than tools."

Fu Hongxue said, "Tools?"

The old man said, "She is the only tool which can make you relax."

Fu Hongxue was silent.

The old man said, "If you won't do this, after you leave, take three turns to the left. You can find another room there as well."

Fu Hongxue said, "What is in that room?"

The old man said, "A coffin."

Fu Hongxue's hand tightened around his sabre. "Who exactly are you? What right do you have to command me?"

The old man laughed. His laughter was still mysterious and cunning.

Just as his laughter emerged, his face disappeared into the darkness, as though it had never emerged from it.

Fu Hongxue passed through all of the piles of gems. Without even looking back, he walked out. In his eyes, these priceless gems were nothing more than piles of garbage.

After he walked out of the room, he immediately turned left, three times in a row. He really did see a door.

It was an empty room. The only thing in it was a coffin. It was an excellent coffin of nanmu wood. In length and in width, it seemed to have been made based on measurements of Fu Hongxue's body. There was a set of black trousers placed on top of the coffin as well. Its measurements were, of course, perfectly matched to his body frame.

These had all been prepared especially for him. Every aspect was prepared meticulously. This wasn't the first time they had done this, after all.

He could even imagine how, after he died, a new page would be added to that ledger.

*Fu Hongxue was too tired and exhausted, arrogant and stupid, on X day of X month. The young master was overjoyed.*

*On X day of X month, Fu Hongxue died to his sword.*

He naturally wouldn't see this ledger entry. The people who could see the entry would surely be very happy and cheerful.

The coffin was cold and hard. The newly applied black paint glimmered slightly.

He suddenly turned around, first returning to that gem-filled treasury. Once again, the dull, monotonous sound of a sword being drawn could be heard from within.

But he didn't stop. He took three right turns in a row, then pushed open a door on the left.

Inside, the room was dark. Nothing could be seen, but a light fragrance could be smelled.

He walked in and closed the door. He knew where the bed was. He could already hear his own heart begin to jump.

Was there really someone on the bed? What type of person?

He was incapable of treating a living person as a tool. But he also knew that what that old man said was the truth.

If a person wanted to make himself relax, this definitely was the most efficacious method.

The room was very quiet. He finally heard a person breathing. It was a light, yet evenly spaced sound, like a gentle spring breeze blowing over the plains.

He couldn't resist testing a question. "Who are you? Why are you waiting for me?"

No response.

He could only go over. The bed was warm and soft. Stretching his hand out, he found something which was even warmer and even softer, as smooth and as glossy as satin.

She was already totally nude. His finger gently stroked her smooth, sleek underbelly. The breathing sound immediately became rapid.

He asked again, "Do you know who I am?"

Still no response, but a pair of hands suddenly gripped him.

A long life of abstinence had made him extremely sensitive and easily excited. He was, after all, a man in the prime of his life. His body had already begun to change.

The urgent breathing sounds had already become overwhelming groans, gently drawing him in. He suddenly sank into a deep, warm joy.

Her body was as sweet, as warm, and as refreshing as the grasslands on a sunny spring day. Not only did it endure, it gave back.

In the midst of his obsession, he suddenly, dimly thought of the first time he had accepted this sort of joy. That time, it was in the dark as well. That woman was just as ripe and just as much to be longed for. But what she had offered, she had offered not for love, but to change him into a man, because it was the eve of the day when he was going to take revenge.

The next day, when he awoke, he really did feel filled with an unprecedented sense of satisfaction and fulfillment, as well as a greater sense of vigour.

Life really is such a marvelous thing. Some times, 'expenditures' could actually make a person more 'replenished'.

The moist grassland was wriggling.

He stretched his hand out. He suddenly realized that this totally naked woman was wearing a piece of satin on her head.

What was that for? Can it be that she didn't want for him to caress her hair? Or was it because she didn't have any hair at all?

When he thought of the pure white back of the girl in the bath, he once more felt as though he were committing a sin, but this sinful sensation made him feel all the more stimulated.

And thus, he totally let himself sink into a sort of carnal pleasure which he had never let himself indulge in before. He finally managed to totally relax himself and extricate himself.

He finally woke up.

It had been many years since he had slept so sweetly. By the time he woke up, the person by his side had already gone, but her fragrance remained on the pillow. The music had disappeared, as though it was like a spring dream which no one could ever catch.

There was actually a light in the room, and the table was covered with dishes. On a banister in the pool inside, there was even a snow-white robe.

Can it be that the woman really was...

He forbade himself from thinking further. He soaked in the warm water for an hour, then ate some food. He then once again felt feeling of satisfaction, of vitality. He felt as though he had enough strength to deal with everything.

Just at this moment, the door opened.

Madame Zhuo was standing at the doorway, coldly staring at him. Her beautiful eyes were filled with cynicism. She coldly said, "You are already prepared?"

Fu Hongxue nodded.

Madame Zhuo said, "Good. Come with me."

The sound of the sword being drawn was gone now. The hallway was as silent as a tomb.

Madame Zhuo was right in front of her. Her waist and her limbs were slender, and her bearing was graceful and charming, making her appear noble and mesmerizing.

But right now, in Fu Hongxue's eyes, she was only an ordinary woman, no different from any other woman in the entire world.

Because he was totally calm, now. As cold as a sabre blade. As steady as a rock.

He had to be calm. Gongzi Yu was waiting for him past the door in front. This door could be the very last door he would cross.

Madame Zhuo had already stopped. Turning to look at him, she suddenly laughed. "Right now, if you wish to flee, I can still give you a few pointers on how to escape."

Her laughter was graceful and elegant, her voice was sweet and warm.

But Fu Hongxue could neither see her nor hear her. He pushed the door open, walked in standing straight as a ramrod, but his walking posture was still as clumsy and laughable as ever.

But there was already nothing in the world which could hold him back. His hand naturally was still tightly gripping his sabre.

A pale white hand! A pitch-black sabre!

Gongzi Yu did not have his sword in hand. The sword was by his side, on top of the stone platform.

A scarlet red sword, as red as blood.

He was leaning against the stone platform, quietly watching as Fu Hongxue walked over. He still wore the terrifying bronze mask on his face. But his grim, callous eyes were even more terrifying than the mask.

But Fu Hongxue didn't seem to notice, as though he had never before seen either this person, or this sword. He had already reached the state of forgetting the self, forgetting the world. These, at least, were the demands he made of himself: No life and death, no victory or defeat, no others, no self. This wasn't just the highest level of understanding in being a person. This was also the highest level of attainment in martial arts. Only when the mind was totally clear and calm could one execute a sabre technique which surpassed everything. Not only would he surpass the boundaries of form, he would surpass the limits of speed.

Could he really achieve this? Out of the many master craftsmen and artisans from antiquity til now, how many were able to achieve this?

The flames of the torches rose high in the air.

Underneath the flickering light of the torches, Gongzi Yu's bronze mask seemed to be alive, and the expressions on that mask seemed to be changing as well.

But his gaze was absolutely calm. He suddenly said, "Are you already determined to give it up?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Give what up?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Give up the right to choose your own witnesses!"

Fu Hongxue was silent. After a long time, he slowly said, "I only want to find one person."

Gongzi Yu said, "Who?"

Fu Hongxue said, "An old man in a metal cabinet."

A strange change appeared in Gongzi Yu's eyes, but they immediately returned to its earlier calmness. "I don't know who you are speaking of."

Naturally, of course he knew. But Fu Hongxue didn't argue with him. He immediately said, "Then I give it up."

Gongzi Yu seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. "Since that is the case, the only option is for me to take the power to choose all six witnesses."

Fu Hongxue said, "Very well."

Madame Zhuo said, "The first person is me. Do you object?"

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Gongzi Yu said, "The second man is Boss Chen."

There immediately was a loud cry from outside the door.

"Boss Chen, please enter!"

People who could serve as witnesses for this battle would naturally be people of great status. The number of qualified people weren't many.

But this Boss Chen looked like an ordinary, common person. Although there was a very friendly look on his fat, round face, he still couldn't hide the terror he felt. Gongzi Yu said, "Naturally, you will recognize this Boss Chen."

Fu Hongxue said, "This Boss Chen recognizes you as well."

Boss Chen immediately smiled obsequiously. "I recognize you. We met a year ago at the Phoenix Market."

A bleak and desolate ghost town. An old and shabby shop sign, waving in the wind.

Chen Family Winery.

Chen Family Inn.

Fu Hongxue naturally remembered this person. But he seemed to have become totally deaf and blind.

Gongzi Yu didn't seem to care. He dully asked Boss Chen, "You are very familiar with each other?"

Boss Chen said, "Not very familiar. We've only met one time."

Gongzi Yu said, "You can remember him after seeing him just one time!"

Boss Chen hesitated. "Because right after this guest entered my store, my store was destroyed. The Phoenix Market was wrecked as well. I..."

He seemed to suddenly feel that his throat was dry. He started to cough nonstop, to the point where all the veins on his head stuck out. It seemed as though tears were about to roll out of his eyes.

Fortunately, Gongzi Yu waved him in. "Please come in."

Madame Zhuo immediately supported him. In a warm, gentle voice, she said, "Let's sit over here. Where there is life, there is hope. There's no need to let past events weigh so heavily in your heart."

Boss Chen said, "I w-...won't..."

Before he finished even a single phrase, he began to bawl loudly.

The two most peerless, undefeatable masters were able to do battle, but one of the witnesses was crying loudly. This was very rarely seen as well.

Gongzi Yu was unaffected. He dully said, "Not only is Boss Chen honest and sincere, he is also experienced and knowledgeable. He really is the perfect person to be a witness!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

He spoke very calmly, as though all this was perfectly normal and natural.

Gongzi Yu didn't reveal any trace of disappointment either. "The third witness is the Master of the Pavilion of Hidden Treasure, elder Ni Baofeng, Elder Ni."

Once again, there was an immediate loud cry from outside!



“Elder Ni, please enter!”

An old man with splendid clothing walked in with his head high. Upon seeing Fu Hongxue, his eyes became filled with hatred and enmity.

No matter what type of person you are, if you could sit down silently when you see the man who killed your son and daughter standing before you, you will have done a very difficult task.

Ni Baofeng had sat down as well. He was seated next to the still-blubbering Boss Chen, but his eyes were still fixed on Fu Hongxue.

Gongzi Yu said, “Elder Ni is an elder of the martial world. Not only can he know treasures, he also knows people.”

Fu Hongxue said, “I know.”

Gongzi Yu said, “It is truly our great honor to be able to invite Elder Ni to come here and serve as our witness.”

Fu Hongxue said, “Yes.”

Gongzi Yu said, “Do you object to any of my three witnesses?”

Fu Hongxue shook his head.

Gongzi Yu said, “Masters doing battle is just like national chess masters competing. A single wrong move will lead to total defeat across the board. Thus, not even one’s frame of mind can be disturbed in the slightest.”

Fu Hongxue said, “I know.”

Gongzi Yu said, “None of them disturb you?”

Fu Hongxue said, “No.”

Gongzi Yu looked at him. His eyes still actually did not reveal even a slight hint of disappointment.

Fu Hongxue’s face was totally expressionless as well. It didn’t matter if these three were his enemies, or his loved ones. If they were crying, or

laughing. He didn't care at all, because he had reached the point of listening but paying no attention, looking upon but not seeing.

Whether this battle was fair or unfair, he no longer cared anymore either.

Madame Zhuo looked at him from afar. Ni Baofeng and Boss Chen looked at him as well. Each of them had a strange expression on their face. It wasn't just surprise. It was also dread, and also admiration.

But Gongzi Yu didn't seem moved in the slightest. "The fourth is Master Ruyi of Mt. Jiuhua."

There of course came a loud cry from outside!

"Master Ruyi, please enter."

When he saw this person slowly walk in, Fu Hongxue's expression changed. It was as though a dam which had never before failed suddenly collapsed.

## Chapter 24 – The Last Battle

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*In the past, on the nine rivers, I gazed at the peak of Mt. Jiuhua,  
The Milky Way hung within black waters, with nine lovely lotuses appearing  
within.  
I wish to wave my hand about, who is willing to follow me?  
Sir, you are the host of this party, and thus now I lie relaxed amidst the clouds.*

*Li Bai*

Mt. Jiuhua was forty li southwest of Anhui province's Qingyang city. It was next to where the two cities of Jingxian and Lingyang were during the Han dynasty.

In the Three Kingdoms period, the Eastern Wu kingdom established the Lincheng county. After the Sui dynasty collapsed, the Tang dynasty created the Qingyang prefecture. The mountain had already become famous and was considered part of Chizhou prefecture. The mountain was five li north of the county, past the Plum Family Ridge and bordered by Guichi province.

Mt. Jiuhang was north of Linyang, east of Qiupu, was five small streams south of Datong, and bordered the Twin Dragon-Mouth Peaks to the west. In ancient days, it was named Mt. Jiuzi.

The Tang dynasty's Li Bai toured Mt. Jiuzi. When he saw the mountain peak, which appeared like a blooming, nine-petaled lotus, he changed its name to Mt. Jiuhua.

It is recorded in books that "the old name was Mt. Jiuzi. The Tang dynasty poet saw that the nine peaks of the mountain appeared like they had been whittled into the shape of lotus petals, and thus changed the name to Mt. Jiuhua."

It is also recorded in the annals of Qingyang province that "the mountain is forty li west of the county. There are forty eight famous peaks, fourteen crags, five caves, eleven ridges, eighteen springs, and two river sources.

There are a number of other different, unique stone platforms, ponds, ravines, and brooks.”

‘Knowing and Doing Becoming One’, Wang Yangming, once studied within the reaches of this mountain. Throughout the ages, the place has held equal fame with Li Bai’s study.

The god of poetry, Li Bai, ‘changed Mt. Jiuzi to Mt. Jiuhua’ in an orderly fashion.

*“...the Grand Historian’s tour of the south was described but not recorded. This matter definitely happened as the old men say, but no virtuous man of ability recorded it. Celestial spirits inspired and moved his pen, causing him to scratch out the old name and bestow the new one, Mt. Jiuhua. Next, he paid a visit to the men nearby, travelling with them to Xiahou Hui’s home. They sat down upon the snow from the pines, and left behind two or three lines for posterity.”*

This was their poem.

*“The amazing west is divided in two, Mt. Lingshan opens to Mt. Jiushan.”* – Li Bai.

*“The layered mountain holds back the tardy sun, half the cliffs are covered with bright, rosy clouds of dawn.”* – Gao Ji.

*“The accumulated snow gleams across the gully, and the joyful sun flies across the cliff.”* – Wei Quanyu.

*“The dazzling, jade-like trees, a vast mist floats about.”* – Li Bai

But Mt. Jiuhua wasn’t just a place for poets. It was also chief amongst the places where Buddhists held their sacred rites to honor Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha.

The Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha: “Tranquil endurance as still as the earth. Quiet pondering as deep as a deep depository.” Thus, the name taken was ‘Ksitigarbha’, meaning ‘earth depository’.

This was recorded in the Mahayana sutras: “Upon a request by the World Honored One, Ksitigarbha pledged that until he had saved all the living things of the Six Paths, he would not become a Buddha. He often submerged

his own body into hell, and had saved countless lives from torment. Thus, he is called the 'Patriarch of the Nether World.'"

There were two rolls to the sutra of the Original Vows of the Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha. It is very difficult to interpret this Tang scripture, but within it, this was recorded: "The Buddha ascended to Trayamatrimsa Heaven to expound on the dharma to his mother. Next, he called Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha to him and made him the eternal 'Patriarch of the Nether World', so as to eventually bring all the people in the world to ascend to the highest joy."

This sutra talked a great deal about hell and how to pursue merit to avoid it. It was a mourning sutra of Buddhism.

The sutra also discussed how Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha rescued countless souls and brought them to salvation. He did not make an empty vow when he promised to not become a Buddha until his great work was done. And thus, the name of this sutra was the 'Original Vows of the Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha.'

Thus, not only was the sword skill of the 'Mt. Jiuhua Sword Sect' exquisite, it also possessed the romanticism of poets and the mysterious secrets of Buddhism.

There were seven great sword sects in the martial world. Mt. Jiuhua wasn't actually one of them, because they were always very few disciples of the Mt. Jiuhua sect, and even more rarely did they travel abroad in the martial world.

Long ago, the martial world conflated the Mt. Jiuhua Sect with the Netherworld Sect. Both of them worshipped the same two founders. The first was Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha. The other the dissolute man of poetry and wine, the eternal, unmatchable Li Bai.

It was said that the lay Buddhist Qing Lian was not only a god of poetry, but that also a god of the sword. The Mt. Jiuhua Sword Technique was passed down from him. After hundreds on hundreds of years, another amazing hero appeared in the martial world, Li Mubai. He was also a direct descendant of the Mt. Jiuhua sect.

These legends made the Mt. Jiuhua sect even more mysterious and mystical in the hearts of the people of the martial world. The whereabouts of the disciples of the Mt. Jiuhua sect became even more secretive, and in recent years, they seemed to have vanished from the martial world.

But none of these things were the reason for Fu Hongxue's shock. What shocked him was Master Ruyi.

Master Ruyi wore a white robe, and was barefoot in grass shoes. A bald head, a solemn expression, and light radiating from the pupils. Master Ruyi was, without a doubt, a Buddhist of extremely great learning. A female Buddhist.

She looked as though she were already in middle age. Her figure was moderately covered, her appearances was upright, her bearing was respectable and polite. There was nothing particularly attractive about the solemn expression on her face, and even less was there something which should surprise people. No matter who looked at her, they would only see a middle-aged nun who strictly followed Buddhist rules, who was not one bit different from the thousands on thousands of other nuns in the world.

But in Fu Hongxue's eyes, the situation was totally different.

Although her appearance was ordinary and sedate, her jade-white hands were as beautiful as spring scallions, so soft as to appear boneless. She was barefoot in grass shoes, not wearing any socks, revealing a pair of feet which were as white as the snow, so beautiful they could dazzle. Her white Buddhist robe was spacious and soft, without a speck of dust on it, concealing a large part of her body.

No one would fantasize about what the body and figure of a middle-aged nun would be like, underneath her Buddhist robe.

But Fu Hongxue couldn't help but think about it.

The spotlessly white Buddhist robe on the railing. The beautiful, lush body in the bathing pool. The groans and moans in the darkness. The warm, smooth embrace. And those two hands which brought him into the dream world.

In his mind, he actually couldn't separate this outwardly-moral appearing nun with the ripe woman, filled with longing, from last night. Although he forbade himself from thinking about it, he still couldn't help himself.

Although he had already become indifferent to all things, unmoved and untouched, but this extremely solemn, rule-abiding nun caused his heart to be thrown into chaos. He could already feel his lips go dry, his heart rate increase, as though there was no way for him to control it.

Master Ruyi only dully glanced at him. Her dignified, solemn face did not reveal a single trace of an expression.

Fu Hongxue almost couldn't resist rushing over there, tearing open her Buddhist robe to see if she was that woman from last night. But he still managed to force himself to stay still.

He seemed to hear her ask, "So this would be the world famous benefactor, Fu Hongxue?" [Benefactor is a term which monks and nuns use to address secular people.]

He seemed to hear his own voice reply, "Yes. I am Fu Hongxue."

Madame Zhuo looked at them. The expression in her eyes was crafty and sly.

Did she already know about them?

She suddenly laughed. "Master, you have been stationed long at Mt. Jiuhua. I didn't imagine that even you would have heard of Hero Fu's name."

Master Ruyi said, "Although this humble nun is located in distant lands, I am not totally unaware of the matters of the martial world."

Madame Zhuo said, "Master, didn't you meet him before?"

Master Ruyi mumbled to herself, then actually nodded. "It seems that I saw him once. Only, at that time, it was already very dark, and I did not see him clearly."

Madame Zhuo laughed. "But although you did not see him clearly, master, he definitely saw you very clearly."

Master Ruyi said, "Oh?"

Madame Zhuo's laughter became even more mysterious. "Because this Hero Fu has perfect night vision. Even in the darkness, he can clearly perceive each hair on an animal's body."

It seemed as though a strange expression had appeared on Master Ruyi's face.

Fu Hongxue's heart was sinking as well. Last night, in the dark room, he hadn't actually seen her clearly. He had only faintly seen the outlines of her body.

He hadn't realized this up til now. Only now did he realize that his eyesight had unknowingly suffered damage. That must have happened after he saw the old man in the iron cabinet.

Could it be that within that old man's eyes, there was a power which could make others slow and sluggish? Why wouldn't he allow Fu Hongxue to see the woman in the darkness? Why was she waiting for him in the darkness?

The last two witnesses were also invited in by Gongzi Yu, but Fu Hongxue actually didn't notice who they were.

His heart was thrown in turmoil again. He couldn't forget the events of last night, nor could he turn a living woman into a tool.

Boss Chen's grief and pain and Ni Baofeng's hatred-filled gaze suddenly became intolerable to him as well.

And that scarlet red sword. How could this sword be in Gongzi Yu's hands? If the sword was in his hands, where was Yan Nanfei?

What type of mysterious relationship was there, exactly, between these two? Why was it that Gongzi Yu, up to this very moment, was still refusing to reveal his true features?

The torch fires rose up high. The stone platform was as bright as daylight.



Fu Hongxue finally walked on to the stone platform. He tightly gripped his sabre, even more tightly than normal. When he was sorrowful, vexed, suffering, or helpless, only this sabre had the power to stabilize him.

To him, this sabre was far more important than a blind man's walking stick. There was already a strange emotional bond between him and the sabre, one which no person in the world could ever understand. Not only did they understand each other, they also trusted each other.

Gongzi Yu stared at him. One word at a time, he slowly said, "You can draw your sabre at any time, now."

Now, the sword was already in his hand. Anybody could tell that he had even more confidence than Fu Hongxue.

Fu Hongxue unexpectedly said, "You can't just wait a bit longer?"

A cynical look appeared in Gongzi Yu's eyes. "I can wait. Only, no matter how long I wait, victory and defeat will not be affected."

Fu Hongxue did not listen to his words. He suddenly turned around, left the stone platform, and walked to Master Ruyi.

Master Ruyi lifted her head up to look at him, appearing surprised and uncertain.

Fu Hongxue said, "Master, from whence do you come?"

Master Ruyi said, "I come from Mt. Jiuhua."

Fu Hongxue said, "Where did the Prince come from?"

Master Ruyi said, "He came from Silla." [Part of modern Korea.]

Fu Hongxue said, "Why did he give up his riches and honor?"

Master Ruyi said, "To abandon all to study Buddhism."

Fu Hongxue said, "Since he sacrificed everything to study Buddhism, why did he vow not to become a Buddha?"

Master Ruyi said, "Only to bring all life to salvation."

Her expression had become peaceful, and her expression had become even more solemn. But others couldn't understand at all what they were talking about.

As it was, when the emperor of the Tang dynasty sent out troops to help quell a rebellion in Silla, the prince of Silla, Jin Qiaojue, gave up his glories and came to China to study Buddhism. By himself, he scaled Mt. Jiuhua, where he cultivated himself and meditated. All the deeds he had done in his life were identical to those done by the Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha. In the eleventh year of Emperor Tang Dezong's reign, he ascended to Parinirvana. Before departing, his appearance was exactly the same as that of the original appearance of the Bodhisatvva Ksitigarbha. According to legends, he left behind his flesh to future generations, as his body became a pagoda at the peak of the mountain. The pagoda was exquisitely made in all aspects, resplendent in gold and jade, with copper vases in each corner, the colors of cinnabar and jadeite. Within them, there was holy oil which can grant people peace and and tranquility. The disciples of the Mt. Jiuhua sect carried this oil with them at all times.

Fu Hongxue asked again, "Where is the Prince now?"

Master Ruyi said, "He is still at Mt. Jiuhua."

Fu Hongxue said, "The Prince will bring all life to salvation. How about you, Master?"

Master Ruy said, "This humble nun has that desire as well."

Fu Hongxue said, "Since that is the case, I hope that you, master, will give me your blessing and allow my heart to become pure and tranquil."

Master Ruyi's hands folded together. "Yes."

She really did remove a small wooden vase from her clothes, poured out a few drops of holy oil, gently rubbing it against Fu Hongxue's face and hands. She also repeatedly murmured Buddhist prayers, then asked again, "What desires do you have?"

Fu Hongxue chanted, "To be as stable and unmoving as the earth, as peaceful and as deep as an earth depository."

Master Ruyi lightly tapped him on the crown of his head with the palm of her hand. "Alright. Go."

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes. I go."

He lifted his head. His pallid face was already gleaming with light. It wasn't the light of oil. It was a holy light of serenity and peace.

He once more ascended to the stone platform, then walked to stand in front of Madame Zhuo. He suddenly said, "Now, I already know."

Madame Zhuo said, "Know what?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Know it was you."

Madame Zhuo's face suddenly changed. "What else do you know?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I know everything which I should know."

Madame Zhu said, "You...how could you know?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Quietly pondering deep secrets, like an earthen repository."

He walked onto the stone platform. Facing Gongzi Yu, not only did he seem as calm as a huge boulder, he really did seem as unshakable as the earth itself.

Veins had already appeared on the hand with which Gongzi Yu gripped his sword.

Fu Hongxue looked at him. He suddenly said, "You have already been defeated once. Why must you insist on being defeated again?"

Gongzi Yu's pupils contracted. Suddenly, with a loud shout, his sword left the sheath. Scarlet sword light flashed like a rainbow lightning bolt.

Only people with extremely strong eyesight could see that there seemed to be a faint flash of sabre light within in the rainbow lightning bolt.

With a 'ding', all movement seemed to coalesce. All things and all creatures on the earth came to a halt in that moment.

Fu Hongxue's sabre had already entered his sheath again.

Gongzi Yu's sword was only an inch away from his throat, but he didn't pierce him through. His entire body seemed to have suddenly stiffened. And then, the bronze mask on his face slowly split apart, revealing his own face.

A handsome, spirited, and attractive face, but one filled with shock and terror.

That 'ding' was heard again as the mask fell to the floor. The sword fell to the floor as well.

This person was actually Yan Nanfei.

The fire light was still flickering without pause, but the great audience hall was as deathly silent as a tomb.

Yan Nanfei finally spoke. "When did you find out?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Not long ago."

Yan Nanfei said, "When you drew your sabre, you already knew it was me?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Yes."

Yan Nanfei said, "So you were already certain of victory."

Fu Hongxue said, "Because my heart was already orderly and unmovable."

Yan Nanfei let out a long sigh. Dispiritedly, he said, "Of course you should have been certain, because I should have died to you already."

He lifted up the long sword, then offered it forwards with both hands. "Please. Please finish it."

Fu Hongxue stared at him. "Now, is your deepest desire ended?"

Yan Nanfei said, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue dully said, "Then you are already a dead man. Why should I bother to kill you?"

He turned around, not sparing Yan Nanfei another glance.

Only to hear a sigh coming from behind him. A drop of blood splashed towards him, falling near his feet.

He still didn't turn around, but an indescribable, unescapable sorrow appeared on his face.

He knew this result. Some results, nobody could ever change. Some people's destinies were the same.

What about his own destiny?

The first to welcome him was Master Ruyi. Smiling, she said, "Benefactor, you won."

Fu Hongxue said, "Master, do you truly act freely and as you wish?" [Ruyi means 'as one wishes'.]

Master Ruyi was silent.

Fu Hongxue said, "Since you, master, aren't truly free and act as you wish, how can you know that I have truly won?"

Master Ruyi let out a light sigh. "Well said. Victory or defeat, acting as one wishes or being restrained, who can truly tell?"

She folded her hands together, quietly murmured a Buddhist prayer, then slowly walked out.

When Fu Hongxue lifted his head up, the only person left in the great hall was Madame Zhuo.

She was looking at him. When he turned his head over, she slowly said, "I know."

Fu Hongxue said, "Know?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Victory is victory. The victor gains everything, the defeated perishes. This can't be faked in the slightest."

She let out a sigh. "Now, Yan Nanfei is already dead. You, naturally, are already..."

Fu Hongxue interrupted her words. "Yan Nanfei is already dead. How about Gongzi Yu?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Yan Nanfei is Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue said, "He truly is?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Can it be that he is not?"

Fu Hongxue said, "He definitely is not."

Madame Zhuo laughed. She suddenly stretched her hand out and pointed behind her. "Take another look. What is that?"

The smooth, flat stone platform behind her suddenly split open. An enormous bronze mirror was slowly rising from beneath the platform.

Fu Hongxue said, "A bronze mirror."

Madame Zhuo said, "What else is in the mirror?"

There was a person in the mirror. Fu Hongxue was standing in front of the mirror. His reflection was in it.

Madame Zhuo said, "What do you now see?"

Fu Hongxue said, "I see myself."

Madame Zhuo said, "Then you have seen Gongzi Yu, because now, you are Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue was silent. She said he was Gongzi Yu, but he was silent.

Although sometimes silence is a form of soundless protest, most of the time, it was not.

Madame Zhuo said, "You are extremely intelligent. From the hand which Master Ruyi used to anoint you with oil, you could guess that the woman from last night was not her, and was me."

Fu Hongxue was still silent.

Madame Zhuo said, "Thus, by now, you definitely understand why you are Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue suddenly said, "Now, I really am Gongzi Yu?"

Madame Zhuo said, "At least, you are for now."

Fu Hongxue said, "When will I no longer be?"

Madame Zhuo said, "When an even stronger person in the martial world appears. At that time..."

Fu Hongxue said, "At that time, I will be like today's Yan Nanfei."

Madame Zhuo said, "Right. At that time, not only will you not be Gongzi Yu, you will also no longer be Fu Hongxue. At that time, you will be a dead man."

She laughed. Her laughter was tender and sweet. "But I believe that within the next ten years, there definitely will not be anybody in the martial world stronger than you. Thus, for now, everything is yours. You can enjoy all your wealth and fame, and you can enjoy me."

Fu Hongxue tightly gripped his sabre. "You will always be Gongzi Yu's woman?"

Madame Zhuo said, "Always."

Fu Hongxue stared at her. His hand tightened even further, drawing out his sabre.

He suddenly drew his sabre. A flash of sabre light. The bronze mirror split in half, just like how the bronze mask on Yan Nanfei's face split in half. When the bronze mirror fell apart, it revealed a man within it. An old man.

There was a small, exquisite room behind the mirror, with a small but magnificent couch in it.

This old man was reclining on the couch. He was already a very, very old man, but his eyes must have long ago received all the blessings and benedictions of all the spirits of heaven and ghosts of hell, because they had retained their youth. These two eyes were the eyes which Fu Hongxue had seen in the iron cabinet.

Those two eyes were staring at him right now.

Fu Hongxue's sabre entered the sheath. Staring at him with blade-sharp eyes, he said, "Only one person knows who the real Gongzi Yu is."

The old man said, "Who?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You."

The old man said, "Why would I know?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Because you are the real Gongzi Yu."

The old man laughed. Laughter wasn't necessarily a denial. At least, his type of laughter definitely was not.

Fu Hongxue said, "The fame and wealth which Gongzi Yu has, definitely was not easily acquired."

There was no such thing as reaping without sowing in the world. Especially when it comes to fame, wealth, and power.

Fu Hongxue said, "A man will find it very difficult to part with things which he already owns."

All people were like that.



Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, you are already old, and your physical strength is failing you. If you want to preserve everything you have, you must find someone to take your place."

Gongzi Yu was silent.

Fu Hongxue said, "Naturally, you must find the strongest person, and so you found Yan Nanfei!"

Gongzi Yu smiled. "He definitely was very strong, and also very young."

Fu Hongxue said, "Thus, he couldn't resist your lures and became your substitute."

Gongzi Yu said, "Originally, he was a very good one."

Fu Hongxue said, "Unfortunately, at the Phoenix Market, he was defeated by my sabre."

Gongzi Yu said, "To him, that truly was a great pity."

Fu Hongxue said, "And to you?"

Gongzi Yu said, "The same."

Fu Hongxue said, "The same?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Since there was already a stronger person to replace him, why should I use him?"

Fu Hongxue sneered.

Gongzi Yu said, "But I promised him that if he could defeat you within this year, he could still have everything!"

He once more reiterated, "I wanted him to defeat you, not to kill you."

Fu Hongxue said, "Because you want the strongest person."

Gongzi Yu said, "Right."

Fu Hongxue said, "He believed that the most fearful part of my sabreplay is my drawing of the sabre."

Gongzi Yu said, "So he bitterly trained in drawing his sword. Unfortunately, after a year, he still wasn't certain of beating you."

Fu Hongxue said, "So that made him want the Sorrowful Book and the Peacock Plume all the more."

Gongzi Yu said, "So he was wrong."

Fu Hongxue said, "This was his mistake as well?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Yes!"

Fu Hongxue said, "Why?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Because he didn't know that these two things had long ago fallen into my hands."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth.

Gongzi Yu said, "He also didn't know that these two things simply weren't as terrifying as the legends made them out to be. Even if he had obtained them, he still wouldn't be assured of victory against you."

Legends made everything in them better than they actually were. Fu Hongxue understood this.

Gongzi Yu said, "I could tell long ago that you were stronger than him, because you have a strangely tough and resilient sabre."

He explained, "You can resist pain which others cannot endure, and can withstand attacks which others cannot handle."

Fu Hongxue said, "So you hoped that I would win this battle from the start."

Gongzi Yu said, "So I had Zhuo Zi keep you company. I didn't want you to be too tense before the final battle."

Fu Hongxue shut his mouth again. Now, he finally understood everything. All of the unexplicable mysteries suddenly became very simple in the blink of an eye.

Staring at him, Gongzi Yu said, "And so, you are now Gongzi Yu."

Fu Hongxue said, "I am only Gongzi Yu's body double."

Gongzi Yu said, "But you already have everything!"

Fu Hongxue said, "No one can truly have this 'everything'. This 'everything' will forever be yours."

Gongzi Yu said, "Therefore..."

Fu Hongxue said, "Therefore, right now I am still Fu Hongxue."

Gongzi Yu's pupils suddenly contracted. "You aren't willing to accept everything?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Right."

His pupils contracted, and his hand tightened again. The hand with which he drew his sabre.

After a long time, Gongzi Yu suddenly laughed. "You can already tell that I am an old man."

Fu Hongxue admitted to it.

Gongzi Yu said, "You are thirty five or thirty six years old this year, yes?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Thirty seven."

Gongzi Yu said, "Do you know how old I am?"

Fu Hongxue said, "Sixty?"

Gongzi Yu laughed again.

A very strange laugh, one filled with an indescribable cynicism and sorrow.

Fu Hongxue said, "You aren't sixty yet?"

Gongzi Yu said, "This year, I am thirty seven."

Fu Hongxue stared at him in shock, looking at the wrinkles on his face and his snow-white hair.

He couldn't believe it. But he knew that a decrepit-looking person wasn't necessarily decrepit because of the passage of years. Many things could make someone old.

Longing could make one old. Sadness and pain could as well.

Gongzi Yu said, "Do you know what aged me?"

Fu Hongxue knew. If a person lusted after too much, he would age very soon. Desire is the greatest pain which man can know.

He knew, but he did not say it. Since he already knew, why say it?

Gongzi Yu did not explain either. He knew that Fu Hongxue definitely understood his meaning.

"It was precisely because I desired too much that I aged. It is precisely because I am old, that I am stronger than you."

He spoke very tactfully. "If you will not be Gongzi Yu, then you will no longer be Fu Hongxue."

Fu Hongxue said, "I will be a dead man?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Yes."

Fu Hongxue sat down, on top of a low table in front of the short couch.

He was very tired. After going through that earlier battle, anybody would feel tired.

But his heart was very energetic. He knew that there must be another battle, and that this battle must be more dangerous than the earlier one.

Gongzi Yu said, "You can consider it a bit longer."

Fu Hongxue said, "I don't need to."

Gongzi Yu was sighing. "You certainly know that I am very unwilling for you to die."

Fu Hongxue knew. To find another body double such as he, definitely would not be very easy.

Gongzi Yu said, "Unfortunately, I already no longer have any room to do otherwise."

Fu Hongxue said, "Neither do I."

Gongzi Yu said, "You have nothing."

Fu Hongxue couldn't deny it.

Gongzi Yu said, "You don't have wealth, you don't have power, you don't have friends, and you don't have loved ones."

Fu Hongxue said, "I only have my life."

Gongzi Yu said, "You have one more thing."

Fu Hongxue said, "What?"

Gongzi Yu said, "Your reputation."

He laughed again. "If you refuse me, not only will I take your life, I will destroy your reputation. I have many ways!"

Fu Hongxue said, "You seem to have everything."

Gongzi Yu did not deny it either.

Fu Hongxue said, "You have wealth, you have power, and the experts under your banner are innumerable like the clouds."

Gongzi Yu said, "To kill you, I might not need them."

Fu Hongxue said, "You have everything, save for one thing."

Gongzi Yu said, "Oh?"

Fu Hongxue said, "You no longer have joy in life."

Gongzi Yu was laughing.

Fu Hongxue said, "Even if Gongzi Yu's fame shall last into perpetuity, you yourself are already a dead man."

Gongzi Yu's hands tightened.

Fu Hongxue said, "Without joy in life, one does not have a fighting spirit. So if you were to fight with me, you would be defeated without question."

Gongzi Yu was still laughing, but his laughter had become very stiff.

Fu Hongxue said, "If you dare to stand up and fight me, and if you can defeat me, I will give my life to you without any complaints."

He smirked, then continued, "But you don't dare."

He fixed his gaze upon Gongzi Yu. There was a sabre in his hands. There was a sabre in his eyes. And there was a sabre in his words as well.

Gongzi Yu truly did not stand up. Was it because he truly could not stand? Or was it because of Madame Zhuo's hand? Her hand had already pressed down on his shoulder.

Fu Hongxue had already turned around. He slowly walked out.

Gongzi Yu watched him walk away.

His walking posture was still as clumsy, as stupid as ever, but when others watched him, their eyes would still be filled with reverence.

No matter who watched him, it would be the same.

His hand tightly clenched the sabre the entire time, but he did not draw it.

I am not going to kill you, because you are already a dead man.

If a person's heart died, even if his body was still fine, it would be of no use. He knew why she pressed down on Gongzi Yu's shoulder. Because she, too, didn't want to keep on living this sort of life.

She would always be Gongzi Yu's woman. In her heart, there was only one, real, Gongzi Yu. No one could ever replace him. Regardless of if he became old, or if he died, no one could ever replace him. So she was willing to do anything for him.

Could he understand this? When would he understand this? Why was it that the silkworms of spring were only able to release their silk after dying?

The sun set in the west. Fu Hongxue stood before the setting sun, in front of the ruins of the Peacock Manor. The twilight was cold and mesmerizing, revealing wounds and trauma everywhere around him.

He pulled out a white letter and placed it in front of the graves of his friends.

A snow-white letter. Deathly black words.

This was Gongzi Yu's obituary notice. It was an obituary notice which had spread around the entire world, and without question, stunned the entire world.

Dust to dust, earth to earth. People will always die.

He let out a long sigh, then raised his head to look at the sky. Dusk had begun to darken, and night was about to arrive.

He suddenly felt an inexpressible peacefulness in his heart, because he knew that just before the darkness arrived, the bright moon would rise.

The wine was within his cup. The cup was within his hands.

Gongzi Yu placed the cup facing the window. Outside the window, there were green hills, emerald gorges, and water flowing underneath a small bridge.

A pair of hands pressed down on his shoulder. So beautiful. So gentle and soft.

She lightly asked, "When did you make up your mind to do this?"

"When I really understood everything."

"What did you understand?"

"What is the purpose of life?" His hand lightly pressed on top of hers. "The purpose of a person's life is to be happy and content. If he doesn't even have joy in life, even if his fame, wealth, and power shall forever endure, what's the use?"

She laughed. Such sweet, warm, gentle laughter.

She knew that he really had understood.

Although others believed him to be dead, he was still alive. Truly alive. Because he had learned how to enjoy life.

If a person truly understood how to enjoy life, even if he could be alive for but a day, it would be enough.

"I know that Gongsun Tu and the others shall not be alive long."

"Why?"

"Because I have already sown poisonous seeds in their heart."

"Poisonous seeds?"

"My wealth and my power."

"You believe that they will die due to fighting for these things?"

"Definitely."

She laughed again. Her laughter was even gentler, softer, and sweeter than before.



She knew why he was doing this. It was because he was atoning for his crimes for her. He whole-heartedly hoped for their joy and peace.

Now, everything had succeeded.

He raised the cup to the wine sky, but no longer asked where the bright moon was.

He already knew where his bright moon was.

A lonely little room. A lonely woman.

Her life was lonely and arduous, but she didn't blame heaven, because her heart was at peace. She already was able to use her strength to make a living for herself, and no longer needed to sell herself. Perhaps she wasn't happy, but she had learned how to endure.

There are many things in life which are not as one wishes. Everyone should learn how to endure.

Another day had passed, a very dull day.

Carrying a basket of clothes, she walked to the head of a small stream. She definitely had to wash these clothes before she could rest.

She wore two small jasmine flowers on her own clothes. They were her one and only luxury items. The creek's water was clear and clean. She lowered her head down and gazed into it. Suddenly, she saw that someone had appeared in the clear, clean water.

A lonely man. A lonely sabre.

Her heart began to jump. She lifted up her head and saw a pallid face.

Her heart immediately seemed to stop moving. She had long since no longer hoped for any more happiness in her life, but now, happiness had suddenly appeared in front of her eyes.

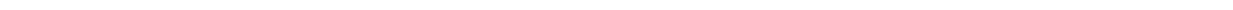
They silently stared at each other for a long, long time without opening their mouths. Happiness came to life between their mingled gazes, like a flower coming to bloom.

At this moment in time, what words could possibly suffice to express their happiness and contentment?

At this time, the bright moon rose up in the sky.

Where is the bright moon?

So long as your heart is alive, the bright moon is within your heart!



## **Disclaimer**

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## **Credits**

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## **Web Novel Sources**

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<http://www.wuxiaworld.com/tymyd-index/>

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